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Her lover was beside her and was suggesting that he escort her home.

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CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
NEW YORK 1914

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TO MY WIFE

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THE UNDERCURRENT

"THOSE whom God has joined together let no man put asunder." It seemed to the bride that the Rev. George Prentiss laid especially solemn stress on these words, and as she listened to the announcement that, forasmuch as Emil Stuart and Constance Forbes had consented together in holy matrimony, he pronounced them to be man and wife, her nerves quivered with satisfaction at the thought that she was Emil's forever. The deed was done, and she was joyous that the doubt which had harassed her in her weak moments—whether she was ready to renounce her ambition to help in the great work of education for the sake of any man—was solved and merged in the ocean of their love. Doubtless Emil was not perfect, but she adored him. No one had even hinted that he was not perfect, but she had made up her mind not to be ridiculous in her rapture, and to look the probable truth squarely in the face as became an intelligent woman. She knew that until recently he had been only a clerk with Toler & Company, lumber merchants, and that he had just started in business on his own account. He was dependent for support on his individual la-

bors, but she had in her own name the nice little nest-egg of five thousand dollars, realized from the sale of the family homestead at Colton, the country town, ten miles distant, from which, an orphan, she had come to Benham a year previous. She was marrying for love a young man who had his own way to make, just as hundreds of others were doing every day, and she was proud of her part in the compact. A great happiness had come into her life, almost against her will, but now that it had come she recognized that it was nature working in the ordinary way, and that she would not remain single for all the kindergartens in creation. She had known Emil only a year; still that year had been one of courtship, and no one had ever spoken ill of him, though she had been told that Mr. Prentiss, as a rector charged with overseeing the destinies of friendless girls who were members of his parish, had made inquiries. Moreover, Mr. Prentiss had agreed that two young people, situated as they were, whose hearts were united, did well to marry on a small income and trust somewhat to the future. How otherwise, as he sagely remarked, was ideal love to flourish, and were mercenary considerations to be kept at bay? Emil was twenty-five, and she just twenty. Youthful, but still of a proper age, and they were growing older every day. Decidedly it was a prudent love-match, and she had a right to be joyful, for there was nothing to reproach herself with or to regret.

It will thus be observed that Constance Forbes was no happy-go-lucky sort of girl, and that though she was marrying younger than she had

expected, she was marrying with her eyes open. She had scrutinized severely the romantic episode which had made her and her lover acquainted, and had even refused him the first time he asked her in order to counterbalance the glamour resulting from that meeting. The episode was a sequel to an accident to the train on which she was travelling from Colton to Benham. The engine ran into the rear of some freight cars, owing to a misplaced switch, and the tracks were strewed with splintered merchandise, so that the train was delayed four hours. The natural thing for passengers with time to kill was to inspect the wreckage, which, besides the dilapidated railroad apparatus, consisted of mangled chairs and tables, and bursted bags of grain, a medley of freight impressive in its disorder. Constance found herself presently discussing with a young man the injuries to the cow-catcher of the engine, which had been twisted ludicrously awry. A moment before two other persons, one of them a woman, had been on the spot, and the conversation had been innocuously general, but they had drifted off. Constance was conscious of having noticed the young man in her car, and of having casually observed that he had an alert expression, and that his hair rose perpendicularly from his brow, suggesting the assertiveness of a king-bird. To allow a young man to scrape acquaintance with her in cold blood would ordinarily have been entirely repugnant to her ideas of maidenly propriety, but she resisted her first impulse to turn her back on him and abruptly close the interview as needlessly harsh. It would surely be prudish to abstain from

examining the battered locomotive, which lay on one side, with its nose in the air, as though it had fallen in the act of rearing, merely because a respectable-looking male passenger happened to be equally interested in the results of the catastrophe. So it chanced that after they had exchanged observations concerning the injuries to the overthrown "Vulcan" and speculated as to how long they were likely to be delayed, their conversation became less impersonal. That is, the young man informed her that he was in the employ of Toler & Company, lumber merchants, and was returning to Benham after having made some collections for them in the neighboring country. Then he was familiar with Benham? Familiar? He should say so. He had been settled there for three years, and—(so he gave Constance to understand)—there was absolutely nothing regarding the place which he could not tell her. First of all, Benham was a growing, thriving city. Its population had quadrupled in fifteen years. Think of that! So that now (in 1886) there were upward of three hundred and fifty thousand souls in the city's limits. It was a hustling place. A shrewd, energetic man, who kept his wits active, ought to make his fortune there in ten years, if he were given a proper chance. Was she going to live in Benham?

Constance admitted that she was, and, helped along by friendly inquiries, she told him briefly her story. That she had lost her father and mother within a few months of each other, and that she had decided to come to Benham, of which, of course, she had heard as a progressive

city, in order to learn the kindergarten methods of teaching. Subsequently she hoped to obtain an appointment as a school-teacher, and so earn her own living.

"When you've finished your lessons and are ready to teach, let me know. I may be able to help you. I'm a little in politics myself, and a word to the school committee from a free and independent constituent might get you a place."

He spoke jauntily though respectfully; but the offer reminded Constance that the conversation was taking a more intimate turn than she had bargained for. She thanked him, and began to move slowly away, not with any definite idea of direction, but as a maidenly interruption. Mr. Stuart—for he had told her his name—kept pace with her and seemed quite unconscious of her purpose. In the few minutes during which they had been chatting she had observed that he was somewhat above the average height and rather spare, with a short mustache which curled up at the ends and was becoming. Also, that he had small, dark eyes, which he moved rapidly and which gave him, in conjunction with his rising brow and hair, a restless, nervous expression.

As they walked along the track the conductor was coming toward them. He had been to the telegraph office and was returning with a telegram in his hands.

"Well, what are our chances of getting away from here?" Emil asked, with the manner of a man to whom time is precious.

"It'll be a good three hours before the wrecking train arrives and the road is clear."

The youth and the maid looked at each other and laughed at the gloominess of the situation.

"In that case," said Constance, glancing at the sloping banks bordering the railroad tracks, which were bright with white weed and other flora of the early summer time, "we shall have to dine on wild flowers."

"I have some chocolate in my bag."

Constance flushed slightly with embarrassment. Her random remark seemed almost to amount to a premeditated invitation to share his resources.

Emil's gaze had followed hers in her allusion to the wild flowers. "I'll tell you what," he exclaimed, impulsively, "since we have three hours to wait, why shouldn't we escape from this culvert and see what there is to be seen from the top of the bank? I shall be able to show you Benham," he added, noticing, perhaps, that she looked doubtful, "for we are only nine or ten miles away."

This was tempting. Besides it would surely be ridiculous to remain where she was rather than explore the country merely because he was a casual acquaintance and had some chocolate in his travelling bag. The circumstances were harmless and unavoidable, unless she wished to write herself down a prude. The result was the logic of common-sense prevailed, and Constance gave her consent to the proposal. So they climbed the bank presently, pausing on the way to gather some posies, with which the party of the second part proceeded to adorn her hat, after they had established themselves on an eligible fallen tree commanding a pleasing view. The fallen tree was at

the edge of a copse of pine wood some two hundred yards from the bank. Thus they were sheltered from the sun. Out of the copse, almost at their feet, ran a bubbling brook, which added a touch of romance to the landscape rolling away in undulating and occasionally wooded farming land, as far as the eye could reach, until it terminated in a stretch of steeples and towers surmounted by a murky cloud. There was Benham.

Although they were too distant to discern more than a confused panorama, Emil essayed a few topographical details. He explained that twenty-five years earlier Benham had comprised merely a cluster of frame houses in the valley of the peaceful river Nye, which still served as an aid to description. Primarily a village on the south side of the stream, it had first developed in a southerly direction, spreading like a bursting seed also laterally to east and west. Its original main street, once bordered by old-fashioned frame houses with grass-plots and shade trees, had evolved into Central Avenue, at first the desirable street for residences, but now, and considerably prior to his advent, the leading retail shopping artery, alive with dry-goods shops, into which the women swarmed like flies. To the west of Central Avenue lay the tide of social fashion culminating two miles distant in the River Drive, a wide avenue of stately private houses, situated where the Nye made a broad bend to the north, and the new district beyond the river, where the mansion of Carleton Howard, the railroad magnate, stood a pioneer among Elysian fields of real estate enter-

prise, sanctified by immaculate road surfaces and liberal electric light.

Constance listened eagerly. She was interested to know particulars concerning the city where she was to live, and she enjoyed the lively sardonic touches which relieved his description. Though possessing an essentially earnest soul, she was susceptible to humor, and had an aversion for lack of appreciation of true conditions.

To the east of Central Avenue, Stuart further explained, lay first the shops and the business centre, and then the polyglot army of citizens who worked in the mills, oil yards, and pork factories. Across the river to the south, approached by seven bridges of iron, replacing two frail wooden bridges of former days, were the mills and other industrial establishments. Beyond these still further to the north was Poland, so called, a settlement of the Poles, favorite resort of the young ladies of Benham's first families eager to offer the benefits of religion and civilization to the ignorant poor. Following the Nye in its sweep to the north, until it deflected again to the east, so as to run almost parallel to its first course, but in the opposite direction, were the public park, the land bonded for an Art Museum, Wetmore College (the Woman's Academy of learning), and the other more or less ornamental institutions. This region of embryo public buildings, garnished with august spaces, was a sort of boundary line on the north, turning the current of industrial population more to the east. Just as the tide to the west of Central Avenue was one of increasing comfort and fashion, this to the southeast, stretching out as

the city spread, and forced constantly forward by the encroachments of trade, was one of common workaday conditions, punctuated (as he phrased it) now and again by poverty and distress.

"I tell you, Miss——"

"Forbes, Constance Forbes is my name."

"Thank you. I tell you, Miss Forbes, Benham is a wideawake city. We have all the modern improvements. But the rich man gets the cream every time. I heard millionaire Carleton Howard, the railroad magnate, say the other day from the platform, that there is no country in the world where the poor man is so well off as in this. Yet it's equally true that the rich are all the time getting richer and the poor poorer. He neglected to state that." He laughed scornfully, and his eyes sought Constance's face for approval. She knew little concerning millionaires or the truth of the proposition he was advancing, but it interested her to perceive that he was evidently on the side of the unfortunate, for she cherished a keen pity for the ignorant poor almost as a heritage. Her father had been a country physician—an energetic, sympathetic man, whose large vitality had been spent in relieving the sufferings of a clientage of small tillers of the soil over an area of fifteen miles. He had often spoken to her with pathos of the patient struggles of the common people. Her own susceptibility to human suffering had been early quickened by the destiny of her mother, who had been thrown from a sleigh shortly after Constance's birth, and had remained a paralytic invalid to the day of her death, requiring incessant care.

"When I run for Congress," he resumed, scowling slightly as he fixed his gaze on the murky cloud surmounting Benham, "it'll be on a platform advocating government ownership of railroads, telegraphs, water-works, electric street cars, and all the other fat things out of which our modern philanthropists with capital squeeze enormous profits at the expense of their fellow-citizens. I'm against all that sort of thing. Buy a gas plant to-day and consolidate it with another to-morrow. Profit to the promoter two hundred per cent., without leaving the office. What does the consumer get? Cheaper gas and greater efficiency. That's the fine-sounding tag; and some of the horny-handed multitude are guileless enough to believe it. It won't be long though now before I make my own pile," he added, not quite relevantly. "I'd have made it before this if they hadn't hindered me."

Constance perceived that he expected her to inquire what this meant, and she was curious to know. So she asked.

"My employers, Toler & Company. If I had had the capital and the opportunities of those people, I should be wearing diamonds. I've tried to point out to them more than once that they were throwing big chances away by being so conservative and old-fashioned in their methods instead of branching out boldly and making a ten strike. One thing is certain, I'm not going to invent ideas for them for a pitiful one thousand dollars a year much longer. If they think they can afford not to raise my salary and give me a chance to show what I can do, I'm going to let

them try after January first. It isn't very pleasant, Miss Forbes, to be doing most of the work and see someone else reaping all the profits. They can't help making money, old fogies as they are."

It was certainly a galling situation. Constance, who was young herself, felt that she sympathized with his desire to compel recognition.

"It doesn't seem right at all," she said, "that you should be kept down."

"I've made up my mind to give them notice that I must have an interest in the business after the first of the year, or I quit and start on my own account. I've my eye on a man with five thousand dollars who will go into partnership with me I hope."

Constance thought of her own five thousand dollars. She would almost like to lend it to him, though, of course, that was out of the question. Still, there would be no harm in offering moral support. "If I were a man," she said, "and had faith in my own abilities, I wouldn't remain in a subordinate position a moment longer than was really necessary."

In response to this note of sympathy Emil opened his bag and produced two sticks of chocolate. He broke them apart and presented one to his companion. He also exhibited a compressible metal drinking-cup, which he filled from the bubbling brook. A crow cawed in the pine copse as though to call attention to the idyl, but only the two philosophers on the fallen tree-trunk were within hearing of his note of irony, and they regarded it merely as an added rural charm.

"Would you object to my smoking my pipe?"

"Not in the least. My father was devoted to his pipe."

Another bond of sympathy. Or at least an indication to the swain that here was a maiden who was no spoil-sport and who would not have to be wooed by the sacrifice of personal comfort. Moreover, it was not lost on him that she was an attractive-looking maiden, and that her voice was well modulated and refined. Yet he was not thinking of her, but merely of her sex in general, when he said, "Besides, I hope to be married some day. How could I support a wife in Benham on one thousand dollars a year in the manner in which I should wish her to live?"

Constance could not answer this question, and did not try. It belonged to the category of remarks which were to be treated by a single woman as monologues. But she was keenly interested. One thousand dollars a year did not seem to her a very pitiful sum for a young couple just starting in life. She had heard her father say that when he married her mother he had only a hundred dollars in the world, and no assurance of practice. But that was not in Benham. She had already divined that Benham was to be a land of surprises. At all events she could not help admiring Mr. Stuart's chivalric attitude toward his future wife. His ambition was obviously quickened by the thought of his future sweetheart, whoever she might be; which was an agreeable tribute to her own sex, suggesting susceptibility to sentiment.

"Yes, I'd have been married before this if Toler & Company had not, as you say, kept me

down," he continued, pensively, blowing a ring of smoke to emphasize his mood. "When after working hard all day I go to my room at night and take up my violin, I often think that if I could play to the woman I loved, instead of to the blank wall, how much happier I should be. But I suppose some of my friends would declare that I was a fool to desire a yoke around my neck before fate placed it there."

His own readiness to relieve the stress of his confession by a sardonic turn counteracted the constraint which his intimate avowal had aroused. Incredible as it is that a man in his sober senses should offer himself to a woman the first time he beholds her, no woman is altogether unaware that he is liable to do so. A modest and thoughtful young girl shrinks from precipitate progress in affairs of the heart. Obviously the ground was less dangerous than it had for a moment appeared, but Constance sought the avenue of escape which his allusion to music offered. Besides it pleased her to hear that he was æsthetic in his interests.

"You play on the violin, then?" she asked. "I envy anybody who has the talent and the opportunity for anything of that sort. I sing a little, but my voice is uncultivated, for in Colton there was no one to tell us our faults." The earnest gleam in her fine dark eyes seemed to second the fresh enthusiasm of her tone.

The warning scream of the whistle, not the voice of the crow, broke in at this point on their preoccupation with each other. This was the romantic episode from which their acquaintance

dated—an episode which might readily have signified nothing. But on the other hand, it naturally supplied to the party of the second part a fair field of memory in which her imagination might wander when stirred by the subsequent attentions of this young knight with sympathy for the unfortunate, resolute confidence in his own abilities, generous views in regard to matrimony and a sensitive, æsthetic soul. For Emil Stuart sought her out at once, visited her at her lodgings and gave unmistakable signs that his purpose was both honorable and definite. Within six months she knew from his own lips that he wished to make her his wife. She took another three in which to conquer her scruples and maidenly disinclination to be won too easily. Why should she not yield? He was her first lover, and she loved him, and he declared with fervor that he adored her. Contact with the conditions of a large city had shown her unmistakably that only after years of struggle could she hope to be more than a mere hand-maiden in the work of education, and that during the early period of her employment, if not indeed for life, the hours of work would be long and confining and her pleasures few. Here was a companion who would provide her with a home, and upon whom the tenderness of her woman's nature could be freely bestowed. It was the old, old story, she said to herself, but was there a better one?

II

THE young couple bought a small house on the outskirts of the city, some distance beyond the Nye, where it flows at right angles with its original course, and in the general region of fastidious growth, but in a settlement of inexpensive villas to one side of the trend of fashion. The bridegroom had not forgotten his liberal intention to begin housekeeping on a somewhat more ambitious scale than his salary as a clerk had warranted. He was now the senior partner in the firm of Stuart & Robinson, lumber dealers, which had been in existence six months. He had parted from his employers, Toler & Company, on the first of January, because of their refusal to accede to his demands, and had been able to persuade the comrade with five thousand dollars, to whom he had referred at his first meeting with Constance, to enter into a business alliance. Robinson was three years his junior, and without commercial experience, but eager to turn the windfall, which had come to him through the death of an aunt, into a cool million. What could be more natural than to take advantage of the experience which Stuart offered him—an experience which gave promise of swift and lucrative operations in the near future?

It was a very modest establishment, from the standpoint of affluence. A neat little house of

eight rooms supplied with modern improvements, and, though one of a builder's batch, designed with some regard for artistic effect, which indicated that a preference for harmonious beauty was working in the popular mind of Benham against the idols, colorless uniformity and bedizened ugliness. To the bride, whose experience of housekeeping was limited to a country town where colorless uniformity ruled undisturbed and modern improvements were unknown, the expenditure of her nest-egg of five thousand dollars in this complete little home seemed an investment no less enchanting than wise. Five thousand for the house, with a subsequent mortgage upon it of one thousand for the purchase of the furniture and to provide a small bank balance for emergencies. This was her contribution to the domestic partnership, and she rejoiced to think that her ability to help to this extent would leave Emil a free hand for the display of his business talent.

The basis of a newly married woman's peace of soul is trust. She feels that the responsibility is on her husband to make good the manly qualities with which she has endowed him, and because of which she has consented to become his mate. Occasionally during the first few months of her married life Constance laughed to think that all her maidenly eagerness to solve the riddle of life brilliantly, and all her profound searching of the mysteries of the universe should have ended in her becoming an every-day housewife with dustpan and brush, and the wife of one who, to all outward appearances, was an every-day young man. But her laugh savored of gladness. She

had given herself to him because she had faith that his energy, self-reliance, fearless humor and sympathetic hatred of shams would distinguish him presently from the common herd of men, and vindicate her infatuation. She had given herself to him, besides, because he loved her—a delightful consciousness. Accordingly, she enclosed herself in the web of happiness which her confidence in him had spun about her, and took up her domestic duties with light-hearted devotion.

Nevertheless, no woman emerges from her honeymoon with exactly the same estimate of her lover as before. If nothing else, she has seen his mental and moral characteristics in their undress, so to speak, and become habituated to their sublimity. We may be no less fond of a person whose anecdotes have grown familiar to us, and analogously a wife does not weary of her husband's qualities merely because they have lost the glamor of novelty. On the contrary she is apt to continue to adore them because they are his. Still she feels free to scrutinize them closely and—unconsciously at least—to submit them to the test of her own silent judgment. She discovers, too, of course, that he has sides and idiosyncrasies the existence of which she never suspected. Ordinarily she finds to her surprise that his attitude in regard to this or that matter has shifted perceptibly since marriage, so that, instead of being lukewarm or ardent, as the case may be, he has become almost strenuous or indifferent in his attitude. Hence she divines that during their courtship some of his real opinions and tendencies have been kept in retreat.

Constance sensibly had decided in advance that Emil was not perfect, so she was prepared to discover a blemish here and there. In spite of her happiness it became obvious to her during the first six months of their married life that the self-confidence which had attracted her verged at times on braggadocio, and moreover that opposition or disappointment made him sour and morose. If his affairs were prospering, his spirits rose, his wits scintillated, and he spoke of the world with a gay, if sardonic, forbearance, which suggested that it was soon to be his foot-ball. But if matters went wrong, he not only became depressed, but was prone to dwell upon his own ill-luck, and inveigh bitterly against the existing conditions of society. She had noticed from the first days of their acquaintance that there appeared to be an inconsistency between his eagerness to grow rich and his enmity toward the capitalists of Benham; but she had gathered that he was merely eager to put himself in a position where his sympathy for the toiling mass could be fortified by the opportunities which wealth would afford. But now that his feverish absorption in business had apparently banished all interest in philanthropic undertakings from his thoughts, the inconsistency was more conspicuous.

Constance spoke to Emil about this at last. Naturally, she broached the topic when he was in one of his sanguine moods. In response he took out his pocket-book and asked her how much she required, having jumped to the conclusion that she was beating around the bush and had some particular object of charity in view.

"You don't understand, exactly, Emil," she answered. "I'm not asking for money; I was merely hoping that having me to provide for isn't going to cut you off from your former associations—to lessen your sympathy with political movements for the protection of the people such as you used to take part in before we were married."

Stuart frowned, and thrust his hands deep into his pockets as he was apt to do when he felt his oats. "You don't seem to realize, Constance, that a man starting in business needs all his energy and watchfulness to avoid having his head thrust under water by the fellows who are on the surface of the commercial whirlpool and who don't want company. When I've got the sharks in my line of trade where I want them, which is, metaphorically speaking, at the bottom of the pond, it'll be time enough to take up politics. You'd like to see me in Congress some day, wouldn't you? Well, that will be plain sailing for me in this district as soon as I control the lumber business of Benham, little saint."

This sounded plausible, and did not seem to admit of argument, provided the consummation of the business supremacy indicated by her husband was not deferred too long. She dismissed the matter from her mind for the time being. It was less easy to dispose of another tendency which had revealed itself in unmistakable guise since their marriage, and this was Emil's indifferent attitude, not merely toward her form of religious faith, but toward all religion. Within a short time after their acquaintance began she had discovered that he was not an Episcopalian, and that his views

regarding the spiritual problems of the universe were not those of orthodox Christians. But on the other hand, although he was fond even then of blowing down her card-houses, as he called them, with an occasional blast of scientific truth, he had been ready to accompany her to church and had never seemed lacking in reverence. She had asked herself the question why she should stifle her love for him merely because his conception of the eternal mysteries did not coincide with her own, and she had answered it by the independent assurance that his attitude toward life was the important consideration. She had even been fascinated by his broad outlook on the universe, with his flashing eyes and his righteous contempt for some of the dogmas of the sects. He had seemed to her imagination at such times almost as a reforming archangel purging away the dross of superstition and convention from the essentials of religious faith. He did not believe in the miracles, it is true, because he regarded them as violations of the laws of the universe; but was he not a firm believer in the spirit of Christian conduct?

She had reasoned thus as a maiden, and had never doubted the soundness of her self-justification. But the sequel was disturbing to her peace of mind and to her hopes. It was not Emil's refusal to go to church, nor his dedication of the Sabbath to mere rest and recreation which distressed her, but his scornful tone in regard to any form of religious ceremonial; his scornful tone toward her own reverence for the faith in which she had been educated. Even the term of endearment which he coined for her, "little saint," was

a jocose and condescending appellation reflecting on her susceptibility to ideas which clever people had discarded as fatuous. She could have borne without complaint going to church alone had he been willing to respect her opinions as she respected his. But on her return from service he was sure to greet her with some ironical jest which made painfully clear that he regarded her habit of worship as a sign of mental inferiority. His own habit on Sunday was to remain in bed until after the church hour. Then he would establish himself in a loose-fitting woolen garment, which he called his smoking-jacket, on the porch or in the sitting-room and read the Sunday papers, with a pipe in his mouth. Sometimes he played on his violin, and by the time Constance returned he was ready for a short walk, ostensibly for the sake of exercising a small black and white terrier. His wife could not accompany him on this stroll, for she could not neglect their mid-day dinner, and when he sat down at table he was apt, if the weather was fine, to refer pathetically to the sin of having wasted it in the city. "If only you were content, little saint, to worship nature with me," he would say, "we would get away into the country with a luncheon basket the first thing in the morning and make a day of it in the woods."

There was something winsome in this proposition, especially as the inability to enjoy an outing because of her reluctance to renounce church worship seemed to spoil his day in a double sense. For, as a consequence, he ate a huge Sunday dinner, including two bottles of beer, smoked more than his wont, and after a tirade against the evils

of monopoly or some kindred topic invariably fell into a heavy slumber on the lounge, from which he did not awaken until nearly sunset.

"Another Sunday wasted," he more than once remarked by way of melancholy comment on this state of affairs.

No wonder that Constance was perplexed as to her duty. Since coming to Benham she had been a member of Rev. George Prentiss's parish. Her mother was of English descent, and Constance had been brought up in the Episcopal faith. At Colton there had been no church of that denomination, and to attend the Episcopal service one had to drive or walk two miles to a neighboring village. It had often seemed to Constance more important to remain at home with her invalid mother than to take this excursion. Consequently, during her girlhood, she had been irregular in her attendance at church. Frequently, in order to be able to return home more speedily, she had worshipped at the Methodist or Unitarian meeting-house in the village. Sometimes she had stayed away altogether; therefore she understood the fascination of communion with books or with spring buds or autumn leaves as a substitute for worship in the sanctuary. Her untrammelled experience had made her open-minded and independent, but on the other hand the difficulty of kneeling at her own shrine had nourished her sentiment for the Episcopal faith, so that she had rejoiced spiritually in the opportunity, which her residence in Benham afforded, to become a regular and devoted member of Mr. Prentiss's flock. Moreover, the vital character of St. Stephen's as a re-

ligious body had appealed to her. The little church near Colton had been a peaceful and poetic, but poor and unenterprising establishment. Contrasted with it, St. Stephen's appeared a splendid and powerful influence for righteousness, stirring deeply her æsthetic sensibilities, and at the same time proving its living, practical grasp on human character through its able pastor and active organization. St. Stephen's never slumbered; St. Stephen's prided itself on its ardent faith and essentially modern spirit; and St. Stephen's, by common acceptance, was synonymous with its rector, Rev. George Prentiss.

Mr. Prentiss had grown up with the church. That is, he had been curate to the Rev. Henry Glynn, an Englishman who had selected Benham as a promising pasture for the propagation of the Episcopal faith beyond the pale of the mother country, who had gone forth into the wilderness and had lived to see a goodly flock of sheep browsing beneath his ministrations. Mr. Glynn was a pioneer, and had gone forth in the early seventies when Benham was in the throes of rapid progress and extraordinary development from month to month. His mission had been to spread the tenets of his sect by the zeal and eloquence of his testimony, and to provide a suitable edifice for the human souls attracted by his teachings. In his time the congregation forsook the small and primitive structure, erected in hot haste within a year of his arrival, for a commodious and sufficiently æsthetic building. Before his death, which occurred prematurely, Benham had become a large and important municipality. His successor

found himself not only the pastor of the leading Episcopal Church of the city—which had also in the process of social evolution become the most fashionable and probably the richest church in the city—but a shepherd in a wilderness of a different sort. In other words, he was brought suddenly face to face with the problems which confront earnest spirits eager to redeem human nature in a huge industrial community. The former wilderness had blossomed, even with the rose, but the thistles, tares, and rank grass which fought for mastery with the wholesome vegetation had revolutionized the soil. There were scores of saloons in Benham; there was a herd of immoral women on the streets of Benham; and, most perplexing problem of all, perhaps, there were, only a mile apart, the picturesque neighborhood of the Riverside Drive with its imposing, princely, private mansions, and Smith Street, boulevard of unwholesome tenement-houses, garnished with rum-shops and squalid lives—contrast repugnant and disconcerting to American ideals, and to him as an American.

But Rev. George Prentiss was not the man to shrink from deep and important responsibilities. On the contrary, it might be said of him that he revelled in them. The consciousness that, in spite of Benham's mushroom-like growth as a proud testimonial to the sacredness of institutions established by the free-born, the city had begun closely to resemble large cities everywhere was sobering, but on the whole, inspiriting to him as a worker. His mission was clearly disclosed to him—a mission worthy of the energies of a clergyman eager

to bring his church into closer touch with every-day life and common human conditions. For Mr. Prentiss as an American and a churchman was ambitious for the future of the Episcopal faith. His predecessor and friend had seen in their pastorate only a glorious continuation of English orthodoxy—a spiritual revolt from dissent, transcendentalism and cold, intellectual independence, which would, in the end, gather sixty million people into a Protestant fold, national in its title and dimensions. Mr. Prentiss shared this delectable vision, but he would not have American Episcopacy a mere blind imitation of the mother church or a colonial dependency. He felt that it behooved those of his faith on this side of the Atlantic to gird their loins zealously, and to guide their sheep fearlessly, receiving with respectful attention the interpretations of the spiritual lords of Great Britain regarding dogma, but exercising intelligent discretion in regard to their adoption. This attitude, which might be called patriotism, in some sense reflected the pride which Dante, that stern censor of prelates, condemns. Was the Church of England to prescribe doctrine to the thriving, hardy child of its loins forever? Surely not, now that that child, waxing in size and resources and dignified with power, promised soon to rival its parent. It was agreeable to the rector of St. Stephen's to reflect that the tide of fashion was bearing the children of Unitarian and other indeterminate faiths into the fold of the true and living church of Christ. It was also agreeable to behold in his mind's eye that church—the American church—taking advantage

of this splendid opportunity and accepting with fearless and uncompromising zeal the challenge of infidelity and materialism. The people were tired, he believed, of intellectual, spiritual dissipation, in which each soul formed its own conception of God, and defined the terms of its own compact with Him. They were welcoming fervor, passion, color and all the symbols of a faith which beholds in man a miserable sinner redeemed through the blood of Christ. If the people of his nationality had been reluctant in the days of their early history, when population was sparse and sin was kept at bay by primitive economic conditions, to admit that man was a sinner, could they doubt it now? Was not Benham with its bustling, seething, human forces an eloquent testimonial to the reality of evil and the intensity of the struggle between the powers of darkness? The Church's mission—his mission—was to take an active part, in a modern spirit, in the great work of regeneration by bringing light to the blind, sympathy and relief to the down-trodden and protection to the oppressed.

Mr. Prentiss had carried his theories energetically into practice. He had striven to make St. Stephen's a tabernacle for the prosperous and the fortunate and also for the desolate and the friendless. His wish would have been to see them intermingled at morning service without regard to vested rights, but his wardens assured him that the finances of the church could not be conducted successfully except on the basis of inviolable pew ownership until after the morning service had begun. But he was able to throw the church open in the

afternoon to the general public, and to reserve in the morning certain gallery and less desirable benches for the accommodation of young men and women students who wished to worship regularly and could not afford to hire seats. If it was at first a tribulation to him that his congregation was rich and fashionable and a little stolid, their liberality on collection days was a great compensation, for it gave him scope for extending his influence along the line of his ambition by the establishment of the mission church, known as the Church of the Reedemer, in the heart of Benham's arid social quarter, as an adjunct to St. Stephen's, and to be maintained by the generosity of that body of Christians. When this undertaking was in full operation, under the direction of a competent curate, Mr. Prentiss experienced fewer qualms as he looked down from his reading-desk at the gay bonnets and costly toilets of his own parishioners. He had been assured by several women active in church work that the independent poor were not fond of worshipping where their clothes would show at a disadvantage. As a Christian who was an American, he deplored the formation of classes in the sheep-fold of the church; yet he reasoned that the preferences of human nature could not be ignored altogether in a matter of this kind, and it was evident that his parishioners preferred to worship God in full possession of their property rights, surrounded by their social acquaintance. There was a zest, too, in the knowledge that he was the rector of the important and powerful people of the city, and that he had the opportunity to denounce the commercial spirit of

the age in the presence of men like Carleton Howard, the millionaire, and women like his sister, Mrs. Randolph Wilson, and their friends. If he could reach their hearts, what might he not hope for? Obviously by the support of this class the Church could not fail to increase its revenues and extend its power. The triumph of the Church was after all, for him, the essential thing—the illumination of the souls of men through faith in the Christian ideal. So with this end constantly in view, Rev. George Prentiss ministered to his well-favored congregation in St. Stephen's, and vicariously, and often by personal service, conducted a crusade against ignorance and sin in the Church of the Redeemer and its neighborhood.

III

CONSTANCE FORBES had been one of the students who found a haven on the free benches at St. Stephen's. Almost at once Mr. Prentiss noticed her and, struck by her interesting face, he sent the church deaconess, Mrs. Hammond, to visit her at her lodgings. She was invited to join a Bible class of young women of her own age, and welcomed to the social parlor in the vestry provided for girls who, like herself, were strangers in Benham. Here there were magazines, writing materials, and afternoon tea. While availing herself of these privileges, Constance frequently met her rector. He inquired sympathetically concerning her work and aspirations, and showed afterward that he kept her distinctly in mind. She felt that she could freely consult him if she were in need of advice; once or twice she did consult him about her reading; and she was gratified by the interest which he took in her marriage.

Consequently, the idea of not attending morning service was distressing to her. She felt sure that Mr. Prentiss would notice it and be disappointed. Yet, what were Mr. Prentiss and his feelings in comparison with her obligation to her husband? Emil's Sundays were spoiled because she would not accompany him to the country instead of going to church. His attitude was unrea-

sonable and absurd, but the fact remained that he did not go alone, and lounged at home instead. After all, she was no longer a girl, and her religious faith would not be imperilled were she to miss church now and then. Moreover, though she held fast to her creed and deplored Emil's radical views, she knew in her heart that she was more critical than formerly of what she heard in church, and that she was sometimes driven by her doubts as to the possibility of supernatural happenings to seek refuge behind the impenetrable fortress of a righteous life. There she was safe and happy, and free, it seemed to her, from the responsibility of harassing her young housewife's brains with non-essentials. Might it not be for her own advantage to take a respite from religious functions? Certainly her companionship to Emil seemed more important at the moment than her own habit of public worship.

She began by staying away from church occasionally. Emil expressed delight at her reasonableness and carried out with zest his plan of a Sunday outing. It was a simple matter on their bicycles, or by a few minutes in the train, to reach country air and sylvan scenes, and he was entirely satisfied to spend the day in tramping through the woods and fields, stopping to fish or to lie in the sun as the humor seized him. The working-man's Sabbath, he termed it. The programme was restful and alluring to Constance also. Her husband on these occasions seemed less at odds with the world, and willing to enjoy himself without rancor or argument. After their luncheon he would smoke complacently for awhile and then take up

his fiddle and practise upon it with genuine content for an hour or more, while she sat with her back against a tree or a bank, reading. He still drank his bottles of beer, but if he slumbered, it was only for a brief period. He never neglected his fiddle, and its influence appeared, as it were, to soothe his savage breast, and to make him good-humored and agreeably philosophic. He was too fond of theorizing to neglect altogether these opportunities for the enunciation of his grievances against civilization, but he was lively instead of bitter, a distinction which meant much to his wife.

When their first baby was born, these Sunday excursions were temporarily discontinued; but Constance was eager to renew them, for Emil, after going alone a few times, relapsed into his old habits. Accordingly, as soon as the little one was able to toddle, a child's wagon was procured, which Emil was ready to draw, and by avoiding fences and other barriers, the difficulties presented by this new tie were overcome. By the time the child was a year and a half old, Constance realized that she had been to church but once in the last twelve months.

This had been partly due to the action of the rector of St. Stephen's, for Constance knew within a few weeks of her first absences from church that her conduct had been noticed. The curate, Mr. Starkworth, inquired at the door if there had been illness in the family. Later the deaconess made a call of friendly observation, in the course of which it transpired that Mr. Prentiss had observed that Mrs. Stuart no longer occupied her

seat. The culprit did not attempt to explain, and within a fortnight she received a visit from the rector himself. No one could have been more affable and reassuring. He established himself in an easy chair and accepted graciously the cigar which Emil proffered him. He was a large man of dignified mien and commanding person, clerical as to his dress and visage, but with a manner of conversation approximating that of men of the world—an individual manifestation which was intended to reveal a modern spirit. He was clearly a person with whom liberties could not be taken, and yet evidently one who desired to divest his point of view of cant, and to put religion on a man to man, business basis so far as was consistent with his sacred calling. He asked genial questions concerning their domestic welfare, and the progress of the new lumber firm, spoke shrewdly of local politics in which he supposed that Stuart was engaged, and sought obviously to give the impression that he was an all-round man in his sympathies, and that he took an active interest in temporal matters. When at last there was a favorable pause in the current of this secular conversation, Mr. Prentiss laid his hands on his knees, and, bending forward and looking from one to the other in a friendly way, said with decision:

"I have missed you two young people at church lately."

Constance winced at the inquiry, and her eyes fell beneath the clergyman's searching gaze. She could not deny the impeachment, which was embarrassing. At the same time the color had

"I have missed you two young people at church lately"

scarcely mounted to her cheeks before she felt the force of her defence rising to her support, and she looked up. She appreciated that it was incumbent on her, as the active church member, to respond, and she became suddenly solicitous lest Emil might, and so make matters worse. In truth, Emil's first impulse had been toward anger. It was one of his maxims not to submit to browbeating. But what he regarded as the humor of the proceeding changed his wrath into scorn, and he closed his teeth on his pipe with the dogged air of a master of the situation willing to be amused withal. Mr. Prentiss divined in a flash, from the insolence of this expression, that he had to deal with a hopeless case—so far as the human soul can ever seem hopeless to the missionary—a contemptuous materialist, and his own countenance grew grave as he turned back to the wife.

"Yes, we have been very little, Mr. Prentiss. My husband, you know, does not belong to your church. He went with me while we were engaged, but—but now I think I can help him best by staying away for the present."

"You go elsewhere, then?"

"No. We do not go to church. We spend our Sundays in the country—in the fresh air, walking and resting. We take our luncheon, and my husband brings his fiddle and his fishing rod."

Constance marvelled at her own boldness, and at the ardor with which she delivered her plea of justification.

"I understand," said Mr. Prentiss. His tone was sober, but not impatient. The argument for a day of rest and recreation for the tired man of

affairs was nothing new to him. Nor was Mr. Prentiss ignorant of its plausible value. He wished to meet it without temper, as one rational being discussing with another, notwithstanding eternal verities were concerned.

"Supposing, Mrs. Stuart, that everyone were to reason in the same way, what would become of our churches?"

"They would have to go out of commission," muttered Emil with delighted brusqueness.

The rector saw fit to bear this brutality without offence. He ignored the commentator with his eyes, as though to indicate that his mission was solely to the wife, but he answered,

"They would, and the Christian faith would perish in the process. Are you, Mrs. Stuart," he continued, "prepared to do without the offices of religion, and to substitute for them a pagan holiday?"

"We pass the day very quietly and simply," said Constance. "We disturb no one and interfere with no one."

"But you become pagans, utterly."

"I try to think that God hears my prayers in the open air no less than in church, while I am keeping my husband company." It wounded her to oppose her rector, yet the need of a champion for her husband's cause supplied her with speech, and gave to her countenance quiet determination. Constance possessed one of those lithe, nervous personalities, so frequently to be met with in American women of every class, the signal attribute of which is bodily and mental refinement. Her hair was dark, her face thin, her eyes brown

and wistful, her figure tall and elastic; her pretty countenance had the charm of temperament rather than mere flesh and blood, and its sympathetic, intelligent comeliness suggested spiritual vigor.

Mr. Prentiss was not blind to these qualities. They had attracted him at the beginning of their acquaintance, and he was the more solicitous on account of them to reclaim her from error.

"God hears your prayers wherever you utter them, be assured of that. But I ask you to consider whether the habit of neglecting public worship is not a failure in reverence to the Christ who listens to our supplications and without whose aid we are helpless to overcome sin."

Emil had been delighted by his wife's sturdy attitude. Now that a question of doctrine was brought into the discussion, he felt that the time had come for him to intervene again. "We who worship in the presence of nature are not hampered by dogmas of that kind," he said. "Temptation is temptation, and I for one have never been able to understand why the man who gets the better of it isn't entitled to the credit of his strength and sense. My wife looks at such things very much as I do."

"Not altogether, Emil. You know I miss not going to church."

"I have never prevented you from going."

"But you have discountenanced it, man. It is to please you, and to humor your views that your wife is sacrificing her most sacred convictions," Mr. Prentiss exclaimed with a touch of sternness.

"You think church-going of the utmost importance; I do not. There's where we differ.

Everyone must decide those questions for himself —or herself."

The rector resented the smug assurance of the retort by a frown and a twist of his shoulders, as though he were sorry that he had condescended to bandy words with this irreverent person.

"Yes, we all must," he said, addressing Constance. " 'He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.' "

He regretted the next instant having indulged in this clerical formula, which was foreign to his usual method.

Constance flushed at the words of Scripture, then she drew herself up slightly and said:

"I am very sorry, indeed, to disappoint you, Mr. Prentiss, but I can't promise to attend church regularly at present. Perhaps it is true, as my husband says, that my opinions have changed somewhat in regard to points of faith. I hope—I shall pray that after a time we may both come back to you."

There was no mistaking the finality of this unequivocal but gently uttered speech, and Mr. Prentiss knew that one of the signs of a man of the world is the capacity to take a hint. Though it galled him to leave this attractive member of his flock in the clutches of one so apparently unfit to appreciate her bodily or spiritual graces, he recognized that to press the situation at this point could result only in separating her still further from the influence of the church. "You shall have my prayers, too—both of you," he said, fervently. Then he arose and resumed the demeanor of a friendly caller.

But Emil, now that he had shown clearly that he had the courage of his convictions, felt the need of vindicating his character as a host. He said jauntily, "I hope there's no offence in standing up for what one believes to be true. It's one of the greatest poets, you know, who wrote

> There lives more faith in honest doubt,
> Believe me, than in half the creeds."

"You young whipper snapper!" was Mr. Prentiss's unuttered comment, but he did not relax his lay serenity of manner save by the slight vein of sarcasm which his words contained. "No offence, certainly. But you should also bear in mind, young man, that others no less mentally qualified than yourself have pondered the problems of the universe and come to very different conclusions. A man takes large responsibilities upon himself in deciding to deprive his wife and children of the comforts of religion."

"I am anxious that my children when they grow up may not be obliged, as I was, to unlearn what they were taught to believe in their youth," Emil retorted with smiling effrontery. He was pleased with his wife and with himself and he was glad to get in a final body blow on the person of this officious slummer, as he subsequently described their visitor.

"I am not unfamiliar with that line of argument," said Mr. Prentiss, in the act of departure. "But I invite you to consider whether your children, when they are old enough to think for themselves, will be grateful for the substitute which

you offer for doctrine. They ask for bread, and what do you give them? A stone."

Emil laughed. He was content to let the parson have the last word. He stood for a moment on the door-step watching him march down the street. He felt that he had turned the tables on him completely and had thereby won a victory for clear thinking and freedom of thought. He exclaimed exultantly as he re-entered the parlor, "I guess that'll teach the old duck to stay in his own barn-yard and not come waddling down here to try to get us to believe that the world was made in seven days and Jonah was swallowed by the whale."

Constance, who had fallen into troubled reverie, looked up and exclaimed with emphasis, "Mr. Prentiss is a very reasonable man about such matters, Emil. He used particularly to tell his Bible class that the language of the Old Testament is sometimes metaphorical."

"Yes, I know how the clergy jump and change feet to avoid being cornered. I'm aware they explain that the seven days were not our days of twenty-four hours, but were symbolic terms for geological stretches of time. Do you call that ingenuous?"

Constance winced. It happened that Mr. Prentiss had offered just this explanation of holy writ, and somehow, now that Emil held it up to scorn, the rector's commentary appeared flimsy. She sighed, then with emotion said, "Emil, I wish you would tell me what you really do believe."

"Believe?" He smiled indulgently as he echoed his wife's inquiry, but his eyes snapped and

his shock of hair seemed to stand up straighter. His manner expressed a mixture of amused condescension and the tartness of a dogged spirit suspicious of attack. "I believe, for one thing, that the laws of nature are never violated, and that their integrity is a grander attribute of divinity than the various sensational devices which the orthodox maintain that an all-wise God employs to attract the attention of men to Himself. I believe also that you in your secret soul entirely agree with me."

Constance was silent a moment. "And yet you haven't answered my question, Emil. You haven't told me what you do believe. Why isn't religion just as real and true a part of man as any other instinct of his being? It has been a constantly growing attribute."

"And the nonsense is being gradually squeezed out of it. Why should I accept the dogma of that reverend father in God that a man can do nothing by his own efforts? Isn't it a finer thought that we grow by virtue of our struggles and that the free and independent soul wins the battle of life by making the most of itself?"

Emil spoke with fierce rhetoric. To his wife's ear he seemed to be pointing out besides that his own soul was fighting this battle and that he was willing to be judged by the results regardless of doctrine. Constance had long ago convinced herself that his bark was worse than his bite; that he believed more than he really admitted of the essentials of religion; that he acknowledged his responsibility to God and was devoting his days to advancing the useful work of the world, and in-

cidentally providing for her happiness at the same time. His plea for credit to the independent soul which overcame temptation and obstacles was, at least, manly, and a sign of courage. She scarcely heeded the quotation from the "Rubaiyat," which he was murmuring as a corollary to his apostrophe to free and noble endeavor.

> O thou who didst with pitfall and with gin
> Beset the path I was to wander in,
> Thou wilt not with predestined evil round
> Enmesh and then impute my fall to sin?

She had heard him quote these lines and others of like import before, and she had learned some of them by rote. She recognized their charm and cleverness and to a certain extent their plausibility; but she had not the slightest impulse to revolutionize her own faith. Her absorbing thought, for the moment, was how to be true to her husband without being false to the church. Mr. Prentiss, in spite of his appeal, had left her conscience unconvinced, and now her clear-headed, fearless Emil had suddenly given her soul the cue to expression. Her brown eyes kindled rapturously and trustfully as she said:

"It's the life after all which counts, isn't it? Everything else is of secondary importance."

"Of course," said Emil. "And when it comes to that," he added, "there's no one in the world who can pick a flaw in yours, you little saint."

"You mustn't say things like that," Constance murmured. Nevertheless, so far as it was a manifestation of confidence from the man she loved, it was pleasant to hear.

From this time her attendance at church was very infrequent. She did not cease to go altogether, but almost every Sunday was spent in expeditions in the open air. The cares resulting from the birth of two children necessarily interfered with her going regularly to service while they were infants, and as soon as they were able to walk, the Sunday outings were resumed with the little boy and girl as companions. Mr. Prentiss did not revisit the house, but on each of the two or three occasions when Constance occupied her old seat in St. Stephen's, she felt that the rector had noticed her. He had apparently left her to her devices, but his glance told her that she was not forgotten.

IV

IT is fitting and fortunate that a young woman in a large city, who has given her happiness into the keeping of a man with his own way to make, should be ignorant of her peril, and that charmed by love she should take for granted that he will succeed. But the rest of the world has no excuse for being equally blind, since the rest of the world is aware that there is no recipe by which a girl of twenty can secure a guaranty either of domestic happiness or ability on the part of her lover to hold his own in the competition for a livelihood. It is easy for the moralist of society, writing at his desk, to utter the solemn truth that young people should not rush hastily into matrimony. Assuredly they should not. But after all, is it to be wondered at that so many of them do? Love is the law of life. The renewal of the race through the union of the sexes is an instinct which asserts itself in spite of code and thesis, and the institution of lawful wedlock is the bit by which civilization regulates it. Let us, says the modern scientist, isolate the degenerate members of society, the diseased, the vicious, and the improvident, and prevent them from having offspring. But still the priest of Rome, eager for fresh converts, but wise, too, in his knowledge of the law of sex, whispers to his flock "marry early," and adds under his breath, "lest ye sin." It is a

part of religion, perhaps, for the daughters of the well-to-do, who have been screened from contact with the rough world, and who sit in judgment on several lovers in the paternal drawing-room, to weigh and ponder and to call in the brain to assist, or if needs be, silence the heart. Yet even they sometimes elope instead with the wrong man against whom they have been warned, and are unhappy—or happy—ever afterward. But when we turn from these privileged young persons —the pretty, daintily dressed young women in their Easter bonnets, who worship at our fashionable churches—and from some height look out over wide stretches of streets with every house alike, the homes of the average working population, and reflect that every house shelters the consequences of a marriage, shall we ask pitilessly, "How came ye so?" And if the answer of some be "we met and loved and married, and now we are miserable," shall we draw ourselves up and tell them that the fault is theirs, that marriages are (or should be) made in heaven, and that they ought to have discovered before they plighted their troth that John would be a rascal or Mary a slattern? Is it not the privilege and the blessing of the young to trust? Shall we blame them if, in the ignorance of youth and under the spell of the law of their beings, they mistake unworthy souls for their ideals?

The firm of Stuart & Robinson, dealers in lumber, had started with a small capital, but the senior partner had confidence in his capacity to do a large business. His late employers, Toler & Company, according to his opinion, had been

old fogies in their methods. To adopt his own metaphor, instead of getting up early and shaking the trees, they expected to have ripe peaches served to them on Sevrès china, or, in other words, they let great opportunities slip through their fingers. He proceeded during the first year to carry out several enterprises which he had vainly called to their attention while in their service, and he had the satisfaction of proving his wisdom and of doubling the firm's assets at the same time. Emil's plans were essentially on a large scale, and he was confessedly cramped even after this success. He explained to his wife that if only he had the necessary capital, he would be able at one fell swoop to control the lumber yards and lumber market of Benham. As it was, he must wait and probably see others appropriate ideas which he had suggested by his novel and brilliant operations. The prophecy indeed proved true, and Emil saw with a morose eye what he called his harvest gleaned by others. This vindictive attitude toward the successful was the invariable frame of mind into which he relapsed when he was not carrying everything before him, and as a result those in the trade presently began to speak of him as a crank. His quick comprehension was admitted, but his associates shook their heads when his name was mentioned, and hinted that he was a dangerous man, who would bear watching. It was almost inevitable that a lean period should follow Emil's series of clever undertakings. Toward the end of the second year, he found himself in a position where he had not the means to enlarge the scope of his operations. His work-

ing capital was locked up in sundry purchases which he had expected would show quick profits, but which hung fire. If he liquidated, it must be at a loss, and the idea of a loss was always bitter to him. During a number of months he was obliged to renounce certain plans which he had in view and to remain inactive. A falling lumber market added to his complications. Prompt to act when he was convinced of error, he sold out at last his accumulated stock at a loss, which would have been much greater had he delayed a week longer. But he was left almost in the same position as when he started; the previous profits had been cut in two. This was wormwood to his restless soul. It made him moody and cynical at home, where one child and the near advent of another foreshadowed increasing expenses. He had expected by this time to be on the high road to fortune, and to be imitating the swift progress of certain individuals in Benham, who even in the short period since he had been a citizen, had risen by their superior wits from poverty to affluence and power.

But Emil's fits of depression were invariably succeeded by intervals of buoyancy. Though he still talked bitterly at home of the methods by which cold-hearted capital squeezed the small man to the wall and robbed him of his gains, he began to scheme anew, and to argue that the assets in his control were still ample for a great success if shrewdly handled. The lumber market was in the doldrums, dull and drooping. It began to look as though some of the industries of Benham had been developed too rapidly, and as though a

halt, or what financiers call a healthy reaction in values, were in order. Could it be possible that all prices in Benham were inflated? The idea occurred to Emil one day, and he jumped at it eagerly. It took possession of him. He feverishly began to examine statistics, and found that Benham had experienced only one period of depression since its birth as a city at the close of the Civil War. It was time for another, and the men who were clever enough to anticipate it would reap the reward of their sagacity. What were the staples of Benham? Oil, pork, and manufactured iron. These were the industries which had given the chief impetus to the city's growth, and were its great source of wealth. Emil pondered the situation and decided to sell pork short. If a general shrinkage in values was impending, the price of pork was certain to decline. He had hitherto felt so confident of making money in his own line of business that he had never done more than cast sheep's eyes at the stock market or the markets in grain, oil, and pork futures. It had been his expectation to try ventures of this sort as soon as his capital was large enough for important transactions. It was a favorite notion of his that after he had acquired the first one hundred thousand dollars, he would be able to quadruple it in a very short time by bold dealings in stocks or commodities. He knew now that he had merely to step into a broker's office and sell pork in Chicago by wire. It was a simple thing to do and the shrewd thing, considering his own business offered no opportunity at the moment for brilliancy.

To speak to his partner seemed to Emil unnecessary. He promised himself that after he had put the firm on its feet again he would deal generously with Robinson. Since their late reverses the partnership was not borrowing much money, so its credit was not exhausted. Emil obtained from his bank as large a loan as he dared to ask for, and began to sell pork short on the strength of the proceeds. It was a process which requires small capital at the outset. That is, he had simply to keep his margin good in case the pork which he sold rose in value. To begin with he sold only a few hundred barrels, and within a fortnight the price fell smartly. Not only the price of pork, but of stocks, grain, and merchandise. Emil congratulated himself. Evidently he was correct in his judgment that a period of lower speculative values was at hand. The proper thing would be to sell everything and reap a huge fortune before the dull general public awoke to the truth. His own limited resources forbade this, which was irritating. Still, he could go on selling pork short, and this he continued to do.

The proceeding elated him, for the sudden and large profit was in a sense a revelation. He regretted that he had never before tried this method of demonstrating his business shrewdness. He felt that it suited him admirably. He would be no rash-headed fool; he would sell boldly, but intelligently; he would keep his eye on the general market, and not cover his shorts until the general situation changed. If a serious decline in the prices of everything were in store for Benham—and the indications of this were multiplying from

week to week—the price of pork might drop out of sight, so to speak, and he win a fortune as a consequence. It was the chance of a lifetime. He reasoned that he would keep cool and make a big thing of it; that a small fellow would be content with a few thousands and run to cover, but he intended to be one of the big fellows. Why take his profit when the whole financial horizon was ominous with clouds, and money was becoming tighter every day?

Emil's reasoning was perfect. The course of prices was exactly as he had predicted; that is, the price of everything except pork. The unexpected happened there, and this from a cause which no shrewd person could have foreseen. One day when, in the parlance of trade, the bottom seemed to be dropping out of all the markets, a despatch appeared in the newspapers stating that a peculiar disease had broken out among the hogs in Western Illinois. The pork market stiffened, but became flat at the advance after somebody declared the story to be a canard invented by the bulls to bolster up their holdings. Emil, adopting this explanation, and certain that this cunning stratagem to check the decline would prove unavailing, sold more pork.

A week later—one Saturday preceding a Monday which was to be a holiday—there were rumors in Chicago, just before the close of the Exchange, that the disease among the hogs was no mere local manifestation; that it was spreading rapidly, and had already shown itself in Indiana and Ohio. Pork in the last fifteen minutes bounded upward and closed ominously strong. Before the market

opened on the following Tuesday it was definitely known that the hogs of the country were in the grasp of an epidemic, the precise character of which, to quote the press, was not yet determined, but which, in the opinion of those most competent to judge, would render the flesh of the animals attacked by the dread disease unfit for food, and their lard unwholesome. When the market opened, the price of pork was so high that Emil's margin of protection was wiped out as thoroughly as the tide wipes out the sand dyke which a child erects upon the beach. He was unable to respond to the demand made on him for money to keep his account with his broker good, and was sold out before night at a loss—a loss which left him in debt. He went home knowing that he was bankrupt, and that his firm must fail the moment his note at the bank became due, even if the broker to whom he owed five thousand dollars over and above his margins did not press him. There was no escape from ruin and humiliation.

He disclosed the truth to Constance with the repressed bitterness of a Prometheus. He explained to her with the mien of a wounded animal at bay the cruelty of the trick of destiny which had crushed him. How had he been at fault? He had been shrewd, far-seeing and prompt to act. The wisdom of his course had been demonstrated by the fall in prices. He was on the high road to fortune, and fate had stabbed him in the back. Could any intelligent man have foreseen that the hogs of the country would be stricken with disease? And more galling still, why had luck played him false by singling out the only possible

combination of events which could have done him harm?

"An all-wise Providence!" he ejaculated with a scornful laugh. "A man looks the ground over, uses his wits and is reaping the benefit of his intelligence when he is struck in the head with a brick from behind a hedge, and is then expected to glorify the hand which smote him. How could it have been helped? How was I to blame?" he reiterated with a fierce look at his wife.

Constance could not answer the question. The details of business were a sealed book to her. The brief account of the disaster in pork, which he had just given, was confusing to her, and had left her with no conviction save pity for her husband. She was ready to take his word, and to believe that this overwhelming misfortune was the result of ill-luck which could not have been guarded against. What was uppermost in her mind was the impulse to help and comfort him. It pained her that he should inveigh against fate, though she recognized that the provocation was severe. But he needed her now more than ever. She would be brave and let him see that her love was at his command.

"You mustn't mind too much, Emil," she said. "We have to start again, that's all. I can economize in lots of ways, and we shall manage somehow, I'm sure. We have the house, you know. If it's necessary—in order to set you up in business—we can mortgage that. We've always had that to fall back on."

She knew as she spoke that from the standpoint of prudence the offer of the house was unwise. If that were gone, what would become of her chil-

dren? Yet she felt a joy in tendering it. Why did her husband look at her with that malevolent gaze as though she had contributed to his distress?

"If you had put a mortgage on the house when I first started in business, and had given me the benefit of a larger capital, then we shouldn't be where we are to-day. I wanted it at the time, but you didn't offer it."

"Oh, Emil. I never dreamt that you wished it. To mortgage our home then would have been rash, surely. Besides, if I had given it to you, wouldn't it have been lost with the rest now?"

"Don't you understand," he said, roughly, "that if I had not been hampered at the start by my small capital, I should never have been forced to go outside the lumber business in order to support my family? Another five thousand dollars would have made all the difference."

His glowering look seemed to suggest that he had persuaded himself that she was partly to blame for what had happened. Constance was ready to make every allowance for him, but his mood offered fresh evidence of the crankiness of his disposition, a revelation to which her devotion could not altogether blind her.

"I don't understand anything about the business part," she answered, putting her arm around his neck. "Oh, Emil, Emil, I'm so sorry for you! I wish to do everything I can to help you and show my love for you. This is a dreadful sorrow for you to bear—for us both to bear. But it has come to us, and we mustn't be discouraged. God will give us strength to bear it if we let him."

"God?" he blurted. "You may leave God out of the question so far as I am concerned."

"Oh, Emil, it grieves me to hear you talk like that."

"And it grieves me that you should aggravate my trouble by cant which I thought you had outgrown."

"I shall never outgrow that," she murmured, appreciating suddenly that the substitute which he offered her for spiritual resignation was a cell bounded by four stone walls. She had reached the limit of her apostacy, and she shrank irrevocably from the final step.

"Of course the rich and the powerful and the fortunate," he was saying, "encourage the delusion that if a man's knocked out as I am he ought to believe it's for the best, because rubbish of that sort keeps together the social system on which they fatten. Do the poor in the tenements in Smith Street over there," he asked with a wave of his hand, "believe it's for the best that they should go hungry and in rags while Carleton Howard and his peers imitate Antony and Cleopatra? Ask the operatives in the factories across the river what they think of the justice of the millionaire's God? The time has passed when you can fool the self-respecting workingman with a basket of coals and a tract on the kingdom of heaven. They may have their heaven, if they'll give us a fair share of this earth." Emil folded his arms as one issuing an ultimatum.

Constance realized that he was in no mood to be reasoned with. She had made clear that she could not subscribe to his doctrine of despair, and

save in that respect she was eager to be sympathetic. She could not deny the inequalities and apparent injustice of civilization, and Emil's plea that he had been crushed by an accident which he could not have avoided not only wrung her heart, but filled it with a sense of hostility to an industrial system which permitted its deserving members to be crushed without fault of their own. But she felt instinctively that the best sort of succor which she could bring was of the practical kind. To-morrow was before them, God or no God, and they must adjust themselves to their altered circumstances, take thought and build their hopes anew.

She put her arm around his neck again and kissed him silently. Then she began with quiet briskness to make preparations for the evening meal. It was the maid's afternoon out, and Constance moved as though she were glorying in the occupation. Presently she said:

"Of course I'll dismiss Sophy to-morrow. I am proud to be a workingman's wife, Emil. We'll soon be on our feet again, never fear."

The suggestion of the servant's dismissal deepened the gloom on Emil's face. "I've half a mind to pull up stakes and move to New York," he muttered.

"And give up our home?"

He frowned at the involuntary concern in her voice. "What use is a home in a place where a man is cramped and circumvented in every big thing he attempts? I ought to have moved long ago."

"I am ready to live wherever you think best,

Emil. And you mustn't forget, dear, that my trust and faith in you are as great as ever."

Despondent as he was, his habit of buoyancy was already groping for some clue to a brighter vision, to which his wife's words of encouragement now helped him. He was sitting with his elbows resting on the table and his head clasped between his hands. "I'll make a fresh start—here," he said. "They've got me down, but, damn them, I'll show them that they can't keep me there."

Presently he arose, and walking out to the kitchen reappeared with a goblet and two bottles of beer. One of these he uncorked and poured the contents ostentatiously so that the froth gathered. Raising the glass he buried his mouth in the beer and eagerly drank it off. He set down the goblet with a sigh of satisfaction.

"And what's more," he said, "they can't deprive me of that."

Constance watched him with a troubled look. She shrank at this time of his distress from intimating that she regarded the indulgence of this appetite as a poor sort of solace. Besides, a glass of beer was in itself nothing, and he might well take offence at her solicitude as an invasion of his reasonable comfort. Yet observation had taught her that he was becoming more and more fond of seeking a respite from care in liberal potations of this sort.

She restrained her inclination to interfere, but she saw him with concern consume four bottles in the course of the evening. The serenity of temper which this produced—the almost indifferent calm following the storm—was by no means

encouraging. To be sure his ugly side seemed entirely in abeyance. Indeed, he took down his fiddle and played on it seductively until he went to bed, as though there were no such things as business troubles. But somehow the very mildness of his mood, gratifying as it was to her from the momentary personal standpoint, disturbed her. Was this good nature the manly, Christian resignation of the victim of misfortune putting aside his grief until the morrow? It suggested to her rather the relaxation of a baffled soul exchanging ambition for a nepenthe of forgetfulness—a fuddled agitator's paradise—and her heart was wrung with dread.

V

THE firm of Stuart & Robinson, lumber dealers, was hopelessly insolvent and did not attempt to resume business. The partners separated with sentiments of mutual disdain. To the junior—the dummy—the failure had come as a cruel surprise. He refused to regard Emil's conduct as reasonable or honorable, despite the assurance that the speculation in pork had been for their common benefit, and that, but for an untoward accident, the result would have been a fortune for the firm. On the other hand, Emil expressed scorn for a nature so pusillanimous that it saw only the outcome and failed utterly to appreciate the brilliancy of his undertaking. As Emil explained to his wife, the decision of the partners in regard to the future was typical of their respective dispositions; Robinson, having lost his money, was soliciting a clerkship—a return to servitude; whereas Emil intended to strike out for himself again.

In what field of energy were his talents to be exercised next? This was for Emil the first and most important consideration. His new employment must be of a kind which would provide him with bread and butter until he was on his feet again, but would not deprive him of scope and independence. It must be something which would not require capital. Yet this did not mean that

his talent for speculation was to be neglected, but merely to be kept in abeyance until he saw just the opportunity to use to advantage the three thousand dollars which he promptly raised by a second mortgage on his wife's house. His failure had left him more than ever confident of his ability to achieve success by bold and comprehensive methods. But in the meantime, while he was spinning the web of fresh enterprises which were to make him prosperous, he must support his family somehow.

He concluded to become a newspaper reporter and writer of articles for the press. This would provide an immediate income and would not interfere unduly with other projects. Besides it would enable him to give public expression to some of his opinions, which would be an æsthetic satisfaction. He also engaged desk-room in an office shared by four men independent of one another and interchangeably petty lawyers, traders and dealers in mortgages and land. On the glass door one read "Real Estate and Mortgages—Investments — Collections — Loans — Notary Public." Below were the names of the occupants, followed by the titles of several wildcat companies, the dregs of oil and mining ventures in the neighborhood of Benham, of which one of them was the promoter and treasurer. It seemed to Emil a location where he, hampered by circumstances from jostling elbows with men of means, might use his wits profitably until he could see his way to more imposing quarters. Here he would be unobserved and yet not wholly out of touch with what was going on. On the same floor of the

building, which was a hive of small concerns, there was a broker's office which had a wire to Chicago and knowing correspondents in New York. That it was described as a "bucket shop" by more prosperous banking firms prejudiced Emil in its favor; he ascribed the stigma to capitalistic envy and social ostracism. He became friendly with the proprietor, discussed with him the merits of the wares on his counter, and presently, acting on "tips" obtained from this source, captured on several occasions sums ranging from ten to fifty dollars by the purchase of ten shares of stock or an equivalent amount of grain, requiring an advance on his own part of not more than three per cent. of the purchase price—a mere bagatelle. This as a beginning was satisfactory. It eked out his journalistic income; and the skill with which he plied the process, contrasted with the folly displayed by most of the customers, flattered the faith which he had in his sound judgment. This broker's shop was the resort of scores of people of small means, trades-folk, clerks, salaried dependents and some women, keen to acquire from the fluctuations of the speculative markets a few crumbs of the huge gains garnered by the magnates of Wall Street, of which they read emulously in the newspapers. To put up one's thirty dollars, and to have one's margin of venture or profit wiped out within twenty-four hours, was the normal experience, sooner or later, of ninety per cent. of these unfortunates. The remainder were shrewder and longer lived, and to this remnant Emil indisputably belonged.

He obtained a position on the *Star*, a sensa-

tional, popular one-cent paper. The *Star* was read both by the workingmen in the manufacturing plants, of whose interests it was a zealous champion, and by a large class of business men and trades-people, who found its crisp paragraphs and exaggerated, inaccurate reports of current horrors and scandals an agreeable form of excitement. Emil's employment was to make the round of the dealers in grain, lumber, wool and other staples and report trade prices and gossip, which under the control of the financial editor he was allowed to expand into commercial prognostications or advice. To the Sunday edition he began to contribute special articles exploiting the grievances of the proletariat, which the management of the *Star* accepted and presently invited as a weekly feature. They were written with a sardonic acerbity of touch, which afforded him an outlet for his disgruntled frame of mind and free scope for his favorite theories. He also renewed his attendance at the Socialistic Club which he had frequented before his marriage, and became one of the orators there. It occurred to him that a political office would be acceptable while he was husbanding his resources. Why not become alderman on the workingman's ticket? There was a salary of five hundred dollars attached, and as a city father he would have opportunities to know what was going on in municipal affairs, and to get an inkling of some of the big schemes projected by capitalists, for the furtherance of which his vote would be required. He would be able also—and this was an exhilarating consideration—to hold the whip-hand over the arrogant moneyed men

seeking franchises for next to nothing, by which to extort millions from the guileless common people.

While Emil, with recovered buoyancy, readjusted his plans to meet his circumstances and set his wits to work, his wife met the necessity of strict economy with absorbed devotion. She signed the mortgage with a pang, but without hesitancy. She appreciated the necessity of the contribution. Without ready money Emil would be powerless—must become a mere clerk or subordinate, and his ambition would be crushed. She would have preferred perhaps that he should resign himself to the situation, and without imperilling their home, support his family on a modest footing by a salary or by the journalistic work for which he had an aptitude. But she recognized that his heart was set on independent success on a large scale, and that Emil thwarted or repressed would become an irritable and despondent malcontent. His shrewdness had nearly gained him a fortune, and apparently a cruel freak of chance had been solely responsible for his discomfiture. She did not pretend to criticise the nature of his business dealings. He had explained to her that capital was indispensable to the realization of his aims. She must trust him. She did suggest that he should use the proceeds of the mortgage for the payment of his debts. The thought of doing so was bitter, and she was thankful when Emil assured her with a protesting scoff that such a proceeding would be Utopian. "What," he asked, "was the sense of insolvent laws, if, when a man failed in business, his wife was to cast her little all, her own patrimony, into the common pot for

the enrichment of his creditors? Business people understood that they were taking business chances, and did not expect to gobble up the home of a wife bought with her own genuine means. If she were rich, generosity might be honesty, but in the present instance, it would be sentimental folly." This was convincing to Constance, for she felt instinctively that her children must have rights as well as the creditors. A woman's whimsical conception of business honor might well be at fault. She had made her offer, and she was glad to abide by her husband's superior knowledge.

Her duty obviously was to reduce the scale of family living without interfering with Emil's reasonable comfort or wounding his self-respect. She gave herself up to her work of domestic economy with fresh zeal, doing the manual labor of the household with enthusiasm. By steady industry and thoughtful care, she was able not only to minimize expenses, but to produce presentable results from a small outlay. Her heart was in it; for was not Emil at work again and hopeful? She was proud of his newspaper articles, and regarded his small gains from shrewd speculations as new proof of his capacity for financial undertakings.

The end of a year found Emil rather more than holding his own pecuniarily. He had obtained commissions as a broker from the successful negotiation of a few small real-estate transactions, his ventures on a cautious scale in the stock market had been almost invariably fortunate, and his earnings as a newspaper writer had been sufficient with these accretions to cover his household expenses, pay the interest on the mortgage, and add

slightly to his capital. He felt that he was on his feet again, and was correspondingly bumptious; yet he realized that his recuperation regarded as progress was a snail's pace, which must be greatly accelerated if he would attain wealth and importance. In this connection the idea of becoming an alderman kept recurring to him with increasing attraction. At present he was nobody. His name was unfamiliar and his position obscure. This irritated him, for he craved recognition and publicity. To be sure, while capital was at his disposal, he had seen fit to address his efforts solely to the accumulation of a fortune as the passport to power, but even then he had been at heart a sworn enemy of the moneyed class. And now that he had resumed his old associations, his theories had developed fresh vitality and aroused in him the desire to vindicate them by action. Since fate had condemned him to attain financial prominence slowly, why should he not secure recognition in the best way he could? As an alderman he would be a local power, and once in the arena of politics and given the opportunity to make himself felt, why might he not aspire to political prosperity?

He proceeded to seek the nomination. But he found that there were other aspirants, and that he must be stirring. In Benham the district system of election was in vogue. That is, the city was divided into municipal districts, and each district chose its own alderman. In that where Emil lived the workingman's candidate, so called, was almost invariably successful against the representative of the more conservative element of the two wards

concerned, and a nomination was regarded as equivalent to election. Now there were two factions of voters belonging to the dominant party in the district, one in each ward, and for three successive years the alderman had come from the ward other than that in which Emil dwelt. This was a plausible argument why the next candidate should be selected from his ward. The faction which Emil hoped to represent contained a considerable number of Germans with socialistic affiliations, and it was agreed by a conference of the rival cliques on the eve of the canvass that their turn had come to nominate a candidate. This was fortunate for Emil, as some of the members of the social debating club to which he belonged were of this body. He had already been prominent at the meetings of the club, prompt and aggressive in the expression of his opinions on his feet, and prone to linger over his beer until late at night agitating the grievances of the under dogs of industrial competition. The suggestion of his name, backed by a vote of his associates, received respectful consideration from the political managers, and he at once became a prominent candidate. The last three aldermen from the district had been of Irish extraction, and he was an American. His grandfather on his mother's side had been a German; hence his name Emil. He was an undoubted advocate of the rights of the laboring class, and a foe of capitalistic jobbing. These were signal points in his favor. But the victory would remain to the aspirant who could obtain a majority of the delegates to the aldermanic convention, and the battle would be fought out at the

preliminary caucus where the delegates were chosen by the voters of the two wards. Accordingly the contest became a house-to-house canvass of the district by the respective candidates, each of whom had an organization and lieutenants. There was speech-making at halls hired for the occasion, and some treating incident to these rallies. Poster pictures of the candidates were requisite for use in saloons and on bill-boards. All this demanded expenditure. Emil realized presently that, if he wished to succeed, he could not be niggardly with his money. Men would not work for nothing, and spontaneous enthusiasm was only to be had for remuneration. He drew upon his funds, exhausting the little he had saved the previous year, and trenching slightly on the mortgage money. He hoped to win. The contest practically was between him and a German beer manufacturer, who happened also to be the president of a small bank. The third candidate was already out of the running. Emil in his capacity as tribune of the people made the most of his opponent's connection with the moneyed interests. His satire on this score offset the advantage which his rival received from his trade as a brewer, and turned the scale. On the night of the caucus, the voting booths were crowded to repletion. A stream of excited citizens struggled to the rail to deposit their ballots. There was imprecation and several resorts to fisticuffs. Not until after midnight was the result known. Emil won by a liberal margin in both wards, and his nomination was assured. He was escorted home jubilant and beery by a detachment of his followers, whose cat-calls of triumph thrilled

the listening ears of Constance. She met him at the door, and when he was safely inside she threw her arms about his neck and exclaimed, "Oh, Emil, I'm so glad!"

His small dark eyes were scintillating, his hair stood up from his brow like a bird's crest, the curl of his short mustache, odorous of malt, bristled awry, his speech was thick.

"Didn't I tell you they couldn't keep me down? I shall get now where I belong," he exclaimed as he strode into the sitting-room and dropped into a chair with the air of a fuddled but victorious field-marshal.

Constance recognized that he was exhilarated by drink. The associations of the last few weeks had awakened in her vague doubts as to the sort of influence which the career of an alderman was likely to exercise upon him. But she shrank from harboring criticism. She yearned to be happy, and her happiness was to see her husband successful and prosperous. So she put away the consciousness that his breath was tainted, his manner boastful and jarring, and gave herself up to the joy which sprang from beholding him a self-satisfied victor.

Emil's self-satisfaction was short lived. It chanced that some of the wealthy citizens of Benham were interested in the establishment of an electric street-car system for the city and its suburbs, and were laying their wires to secure the co-operation of the Board of Aldermen. The project had been kept concealed, and not until the campaign for the city election was well under way were the machinations of those interested appar-

ent. First as an underground rumor, then as a well-credited report from diverse sources, the news reached Emil that the nominee of the other party had the backing of a powerful syndicate. The true explanation of this mystery followed, and with it the statement that Emil's radical utterances had drawn upon his head the ire of the capitalists with a mission, who were giving their moral and financial support in every district to the one of the two candidates best suited to their necessities regardless of party. In place of the walk-over he had expected, Emil found himself in the midst of a contest of the fiercest description. He was furious, and his exultation was turned to gall. Why had he not discovered the street-car company projects in advance and made friends with the promoters? This was his first and secret reflection, which added rancor to his public declaration that he would bury at the polls the candidate of these plunderers. But how? Where were his funds to come from? There had been plenty of offers of ready money when it was supposed that his election was assured. But now the tone of his supporters was less confident, and ugly rumors reached him of defections among the Irish in the other ward. He was in the fight to stay. So he declared on the stump and in his home. He could not afford to be defeated. It was a case of hit or miss, win or lose. Maddened, desperate, and excited, he threw prudence to the winds and scattered dollars freely for proselytizing expenses until the morning of the election. Each side claimed the victory until the polls were closed. The result was close—a matter of one hundred and

fifty ballots—but Emil proved to be the loser, and at a cost of over three thousand dollars. The fund which he had borrowed from his wife was exhausted, and he had incurred, besides, a batch of unpaid bills for refreshments, carriages, and other incidental expenses.

He awoke at dawn from a nap at a table in a saloon from which the last of his followers had slipped away. Slouching into his kitchen, where his wife was kindling the fire, he tossed his hat on the table and said with a malignant sneer:

"The jig's up."

Constance was pale. She had been watching for him all night, and had heard from a neighbor the dismal result. Her heart was wrung with pity and distress, but she perceived that it was no time for consolatory words. She busied herself in preparing a cup of coffee, which presently she placed before him, stooping as she did so to kiss him softly on the forehead. He was sitting by the table with his legs thrust out and his hands sunk in his trousers pockets, chewing an unlighted cigar, one of those left from the supply he had bought for political hospitality. His wife's action seemed to remind him of her presence. He looked up at her viciously, showing the white of his eye like a surly dog.

"What do you want?"

"Your coffee, Emil."

He glared at the smoking cup, then with a sweep of his arm dashed it away:

"To hell with you and your messes, you—you fool!"

The crash of the crockery was followed by

silence. It seemed to Constance that she had been struck by a bullet, so confounding were his words. Her husband address her like that? What did it mean?

"Emil," she gasped—"you are ill!"

"Not ill, but tired of you."

"Of me? Your wife? What have I done?"

"Why didn't you consent to move to New York when I wished to go?" he snapped. "If you had, I wouldn't be in this fix, sold out by a pack of filthy Hibernian cut-throats."

"I was ready to go if you wished it, Emil. We will go now—if only you do not speak to me so unkindly."

"It's too late," he replied with a sneer. "What use would it be, anyway? We look at everything differently. We always have."

"You do not realize what you are saying. You do not know what you are saying."

"Crazy, am I? The best thing for you to do is to ask some of your church philanthropists to supply you with laundry work. You're likely to need it. The jig's up, I tell you. We haven't a dollar left."

"Very well."

"The mortgage money with the rest." He threw the chewed cigar on the floor and ground it with his foot.

"Very well. I can bear anything except that you should speak to me so cruelly. Have I been afraid of work? Whatever has happened we mustn't forget the children, Emil. We must keep up our courage on their account at least."

He scowled at the reference. "I'll look out for the children. Is there any beer in the house?"

"No." Then after a moment's hesitation she added, "May I ask you something, Emil? Won't you give up beer? It is hurting your life. I am sure of it. I have felt so for some time, and you have known that I have hated your fondness for it. Give it up altogether and—and we will go to New York or anywhere you wish and make a fresh start."

In her dismay at his brutality she was eager and thankful to throw the responsibility for his conduct on his propensity for drink. She felt the obligation to speak fearlessly on this score, even though she irritated him. Her gentle remonstrances had been of no avail, and she must struggle with him now against himself or lose him altogether.

Emil heard her appeal with a deepening scowl. For a moment it seemed as though he were about to strike her. Then, as what he evidently considered the audacity of her expostulation worked on his mind, self-pity was mingled with his anger.

"You'd deprive me of my beer, would you? The only solace I've got. Why don't you go smash my fiddle, too? That's the way with you pious women; a man gets down on his luck and you stop his comforts and drive him into the street. Very well, then, if I can't get beer in this house, little saint, there's lots of places I can. This is the last straw." Thereupon he strode out of the house, closing the kitchen door behind him with a vicious bang.

VI

CONSTANCE did not see her husband again for twenty-four hours. He returned at supper-time and took his place at the table without a word of apology or explanation. He was in a state of great depression, morose and uncommunicative. On previous occasions when misfortune had befallen him, he had taken his wife into his confidence, but now it seemed either that he had lost his grip on life so completely that words failed him, or that the resentment which he had expressed toward her was still dominant. When the meal was over, he went out and did not return until late. He was boozy with drink, and threw himself on his bed with the air of a man who would fain dispel consciousness by the luxury of sleep.

Emil's mode of life for the next few weeks was substantially a repetition of this programme. Glum, sour, and listless he went his way in the morning; fuddled, indifferent, and sleepy he returned at night. Concerning his circumstances and plans he said nothing to Constance. She was left totally in the dark as to the extent and the effect of his reverses. He had told her that they were ruined, yet he continued to go down-town as though nothing had happened. Trusting that he would enlighten her of his own accord, at first she asked no questions. Then as he did not speak,

she requested him one morning to tell her how his affairs stood, urging her solicitude and affection. He listened frowningly and put her off with the disconcerting utterance "You'll know soon enough. It's just as well to let a drowning man grasp at straws while there are any to grasp at."

His half-scornful, half-desperate manner forbade further inquiry at the moment if she did not wish to widen the breach between them. Constance was in deep distress. She yearned to comfort and help him, but this wifely, loving impulse was haunted by the consciousness now forced upon her with painful clearness that she had misjudged his nature and was mated to a crank. How otherwise could she interpret his hostile attitude toward herself? To what but a cross-grained perversity of soul could she ascribe his disposition to blame her for his misfortunes? Her duty was plain, to make the best of the situation, and to ignore, so far as self-respect would permit, his laceration of her feelings, trusting to time to restore his sense of justice and renew concord between them. But what hope was there for the future? Hope for the realization of that blissful, ennobling married state to which she had looked forward as a bride and had believed in store for her? Here was the thought which tormented her and gave poignancy to the dismay and anxiety of the moment. Even if their immediate circumstances were less serious than Emil had declared, was there any reason to believe that his next experiment would be more successful? She had accepted hitherto without question his declaration that ill-luck had been responsible for all his troubles, but that consolation

was hers no longer. She found herself listening to the voice of criticism to which until now she had turned a deaf ear. In a new spirit, without bitterness, but in the assertion of her right as a wife to judge the man to whom she had committed her happiness, she recalled the incidents of their married life—his theories, arguments, and point of view. He had declared her to blame for his misfortunes. Surely if she had failed in her duty it had not been toward him. She had sacrificed her opinions to his, and for his sake abnegated her most precious predilections in order to make the union of their lives sweeter and more complete. If she were guilty, was it not of treason to her own instincts and her own conscience?

Emil indeed had persuaded himself not merely that fortune had betrayed him, and the hand of the prosperous world was against him, but that his wife was partly to blame for it. Looking back on his last fiasco, he conjured up the circumstance that she had not fallen in with his suggestion of an exodus to New York, and this he had promptly distorted into a grievance, which grew the more he nursed it. To the notion that she had thwarted him in everything and that their relations as husband and wife had been wholly unsympathetic was only another step. It suited him to feel that he was the injured party, for he was face to face with the responsibility of supporting his family, which must be met or avoided. The question of immediate funds was already pressing. His last reverse had discouraged and angered him, but it had not diminished his confidence that he would succeed in the right place. It had only convinced

him that Benham was not the right place; that Benham was too small and provincial; too unappreciative of real ability. He was unpleasantly in debt, but the bills which he had contracted for political expenses could be disregarded for the present. He had no property with which to meet them, and if he were pressed, he had merely to go into insolvency in order to rid himself of them altogether. Nor need he worry about the mortgage for the present. It would not be due for two years, and, provided the interest were paid, they could not be molested. These redeeming features of his plight were clear to him after the first days of mental agitation, but his spirit did not reassert its wonted elasticity. Analyzing the cause, he perceived that his whole surroundings were repugnant to him, and that he shrank from recommencing life at the foot of the ladder under the conditions in which he found himself. He was determined to leave Benham, and he was determined that his family, if they came with him, should toe the mark. What this phrase meant precisely he did not formulate, but it suited his mood. "Toe the mark." He kept repeating it to himself, as though it promised relief from domestic insubordination. Yes, if his wife did not choose to adopt his theories and abet him in his undertakings, she could go her own way for all he cared. It was only on account of the children that he did not put an end to their contract of marriage to-morrow by leaving her. Except for them it were surely folly for a man and woman whose ideas were utterly at variance to continue a partnership the only fruit of which could be discord

and recriminations. So he argued, and it was only the thought of his children which restrained him from precipitate action and caused him to continue to go down-town every day seeking a bare livelihood. Since the night of his defeat at the polls, Constance had not asked him for money. Presumably she had some laid by, and was living on that, but by the first of the month she must have recourse to him or starve, and then would be the time for his ultimatum. The terms of this, beyond a declaration of general discontent, were still hazy in his brain, befogged by malt liquor and inflamed by hatred of the world, but a glowing conviction that their marriage had been a failure through her fault was a satisfactory substitute for definiteness. Brooding like a spider in its web, secretive, hoping that something would turn up to put him on his feet again, yet almost reckless in his attitude, and drinking assiduously, he drifted on without aim. His evenings were spent at his workingmen's club, where he continued as an outlet to his feelings to deliver virulent philippics, which he realized as he uttered them were a sorry equivalent for personal success.

While thus limp and embittered, a final mishap impelled Emil to action. It happened that the broker on the same floor as the office where he had desk-room, and with whom he was on familiar terms, let him in for a disastrous tip and put the screws on when the market went the other way. The sum involved was three hundred dollars, the total residue of Emil's capital, which he had allowed to remain untouched with this false friend in order not to be entirely without the means to

speculate. The advice offered had seemed to be friendly and disinterested. When the result proved disastrous the victim promptly suspected guile. Certainly he encountered a flinty demeanor, as though the proprietor of the "bucket-shop" were cognizant of the impecuniosity of his customer and had decided to squeeze him dry and break with him. This from the man whose social status on the street he had championed seemed to Emil rank ingratitude. Yet the broker was making no more than ordinary business demands upon him. His margin was exhausted, and the transaction would be closed unless he supplied additional security. This was business-like, but not friendly, as it seemed to Emil, especially as the ingrate, who had been so confident of the value of the tip, chose now to be sphinx-like as to what the next day's price of the stock would be. All he would vouchsafe was that it would go up sooner or later.

Since it was necessary to act at once, and to sell meant the loss of the remnant of his capital, Emil concluded to give himself a chance by making use of five hundred dollars which had just been paid over to him for a client in redemption of a mortgage. He argued that the stock, having fallen in price contrary to expectation, was not likely to decline further at once, and that if he protected his account, he would be able to make inquiries and form a more intelligent opinion by the end of a few days as to what he had best do. Besides, there was lurking in his mind the bitter argument, which he chose to believe sound, that the world owed every man a living, and assuredly owed it to a man like himself. Since the hand of society

seemed to be against him, why should he not take advantage of the resources at his disposal and save himself? He was simply borrowing; if he were not able to return the money at once, he would do so later with interest. The consequences of this performance were disastrous. As Emil had predicted, the stock in question remained stationary for three days, but by the end of them he felt no clearer regarding which course to pursue. Estimates as to its value were contradictory; yet since a sale at the market price meant the safety of the five hundred dollars at the cost of his own financial obliteration, he remained hopeful. On the fourth day the stock broke sharply, and again on the day after. His holding was only one hundred shares —a paltry transaction from a capitalistic point of view—yet it was rashness for him. Adversity and his pressing needs had tempted him to disregard his meditated prudence and to venture on thin ice. He perceived himself ruined and a defaulter. The obliquity of his peculation was mitigated in his mind by the conviction that fortune had been signally cruel to him. As for the borrowed money, he would give his note and pay it presently when he was on his feet again. Yet he appreciated that his opportunities for making a living in Benham were at an end, and that if he remained, he might find difficulty in inducing the owner of the five hundred dollars to accept him as a creditor without demur. Clearly the simplest course was to come to terms by post. To shake the dust of Benham from his feet was his dearest wish, and the time had arrived for its fulfilment. There was still one hundred dollars belonging to

his client in his hands which he had not used. This he drew to provide himself with travelling expenses, arguing that the sooner he were able to reach New York, the quicker the loan would be repaid, and slipped from the city without a word to anyone. He had decided to cut adrift from all his past associations, and an indispensable portion of his plan was to sever forever his relations with his wife.

A week later he wrote this letter to her from New York:

CONSTANCE:

This is to let you know what has become of me. You may have guessed the truth, but it's woman's way to worry, weep, and raise a hue and cry, though she knows in her heart that she's mismated, and that it would be a godsend to her if "hubby" had really blown his brains out or were safely at the bottom of a well. I'm not dead yet, nor am I contemplating suicide at present. Though if the time ever does come when I think the game is played out, it will be one-two-three-go! without any pause between the numbers. But I'm as good as dead now, so far as you are concerned. You won't be troubled by me further. You've seen the last of me. I told you I was strapped. I'm cleaned out to the last dollar. But that doesn't phaze me except for the moment. I'm going to make a fresh start and a clean sweep at the same time. You know as well as I that our marriage has not been a glittering success. In short, we've made a mess of it. We thought we were suited to each other, and we find we're not. That's all. I don't approve of you any more than you do of me, and what's the use of making each other miserable by protracting the relation until death do us part? It's up to me to undo the Gordian-knot, and I've cut it.

You'll shed some tears, I suppose, over the situation, and your friends will call me a brute. But when the shock is past and sentimental considerations have evaporated, just ask yourself if I'm not doing the sensible thing for us both. We don't look at life in the same way and never will. I'm a radical, and you're a conservative, and we were misled before marriage by

the affinities of flesh to suppose that oil and water would harmonize. From the point of view of law I'm the offending party, and you'll be a free woman to sue for divorce on the ground of desertion, by the end of three years. In the meantime, you can go back to your kindergarten work or whatever you see fit. You have your health, and your philanthropic church friends will enable you to support yourself.

The only hitch is the children. If you had been ready to follow me to New York when I first suggested it, we might not be separating now. I expect and am anxious to provide for them. If you will send them on to me, they shall want for nothing. But if you are bent on keeping them, as I foresee may be the case, the responsibility is yours. I should like one at least—preferably the boy. If you insist on keeping them both, I can't help myself. There's where you have the whip-hand over me. But don't delude yourself with the notion that I don't love my own flesh and blood because I'm not willing to live with their mother.

There will be no use in your coming on here or trying to find me. I have made up my mind. We could never be happy together, so the fewer words said about parting the better. Send your answer regarding the children to the New York post-office. I shall expect it for a week. The money you loaned me is gone with the rest, but they can't turn you out of your house until the mortgage is due, if you pay the interest. Some day I shall pay it back to you. I wish you well, and consider I'm doing us both a service in cutting loose from you.

Good-by, EMIL.

It seemed to Constance when she had finished this letter as though her heart would stop. Was this reality? Could it be that her husband was abandoning her and her children in cold blood, treating the sacred ties of marriage as lightly as though they were straws? Alas! his cruel words stared her in the face, freezing her soul, which had been sick for days over his unexplained absence; sick from dread. Yes, she had guessed; but she had put the horror from her as impossible, despite

his hints. Unbalanced and embittered as he was, he could not be so unkind. Now she was face to face with certainty; there was no room for hope. It was true; so cruelly inhumanly true that her brain felt dazed and numb. She gazed at his writing stony-eyed and appalled, limp with dismay and forlornness. To avoid falling she put out her hand to the table, and the contact of her own flesh served to readjust her consciousness. Seating herself she swept her fingers across her brow to rally her senses, and read the letter again slowly. Then mortification succeeded dismay, and resentment followed close on mortification. The wounded pride of the wife, the indignation of the mother protesting for her children asserted themselves, causing her to flush to the roots of her hair and her pulses to tingle. Coward! Unnatural father! What had she done to deserve this? What had they done, helpless innocents? Give them up to him? Her children, now the only joy of her life? Never. They could not both have them. Why should he who had left them in the lurch have either? She could hear their prattle in the adjoining room, poor little souls, unconscious of their misery. Then her sense of wounded pride and her anger were forgotten in the agony of a possible separation from her offspring, and in the loss of her husband's love, and her tense nerves gave way. "Oh, Emil, my husband, how could you?" she moaned, and burying her face in her hands she let sorrow have full sway.

When she had dried her eyes she was prepared to face the situation and to think more calmly. Certain points were now clear. Emil was right;

since he had ceased to love her, they could never be happy together. So far as she could see, she had not been at fault, though he had persuaded himself that she was to blame. She would never have left him; but now that he had deserted her, she could dare to admit that their souls were not in accord, and that her love and respect for him had been waning in spite of herself for many months. She would not attempt to follow him, and she desired to retain both the children. Was it her duty to let Emil have one of them? Here was the only harassing point in the plans for the future which she was formulating. Would it be fair to the children to separate them? Would she be justified in keeping them both, in view of the affection which their father had professed for his own flesh and blood? As Emil had declared, he and she had made a mess of their marriage, and they were to separate. Was it fair to him to keep both the boy and the girl? Ah, but she could not bear the thought of giving up either. She felt the need of counsel. To whom could she turn? Who were her friends? She thought of Mr. Prentiss, and she remembered her husband's taunt concerning her philanthropic church friends with a sense of shrinking. The church offered itself as a refuge to all in the hour of distress, but it seemed to her as though she would rather starve than apply to Mr. Prentiss. Not that she was afraid of starving. That side of the situation had no terrors for her. She was almost glad at the idea of supporting herself and her darlings, and she had entire confidence in her ability to do so, even though she were forced to scrub floors. But she yearned for

"Oh, Emil, my husband, how could you?" she moaned

the sympathy and advice of a friend. How lonely she had suddenly become in this large, busy city! Emil had evinced little desire, especially of late, to make friends in the neighborhood, and she had been so absorbed in her home and her husband's interest that she had disregarded her social opportunities. He had been apt to speak slightingly of their acquaintances as people whom he would soon outstrip in the struggle of life. And now she was the poorest of the poor, the saddest of the sad, one of the lowly common people for whom her doctor father's heart had ever cherished fond and patient sympathy. She was one of them now herself. How different had been her dreams and her ambition. To think that she, Constance Forbes, had come to this—a wife abandoned by her husband, alone and friendless, with only the semblance of a roof to shelter her and her children. But all this was nothing if only she need not part with either of her babies. She would be able to support them, never fear, and with them to support she could be brave, even happy. But without them? No, no, Emil had forsaken her, she had lost her faith in him, he was not worthy of the sacrifice; she dared not trust him; he had no right to either. She could not, she would not let either go.

When the morning came she was more firmly of the same opinion, and she composed this reply to her husband:

EMIL:

I have your letter and my heart is filled with sorrow. I cannot compel you to live with me against your will. God knows I have tried to be a loving, dutiful, and sympathetic wife, but it

seems I have failed to please you. It is true that our ideas of how to live and what is right are very different. I have been aware of that in my secret soul, but for your sake I did my best to adopt your point of view. Now I shall be free to follow my own. Since you no longer love me, I am not sorry that we are to live apart, for I can see now that I have suffered much on your account. But I do not choose to reproach you. What good would it do? Besides you are the father of my children—poor little things. I do not think that I should have written to you at all if it were not for the question what is to become of them.

I am trying to do what is best for them and to be just; just to you and to myself. I have decided to keep both the children. They are babies still, and need a mother's love. A father's too, but it seems they cannot have both. Let God judge between us, Emil. They are my flesh and blood too, and it is you who are forsaking us, not we you. As you say, I have my health and we shall not starve. I am not afraid. There is nothing more to say, is there? It has all been a dreadful mistake—and we thought we should be so happy. Good-by. In spite of everything I shall always think of you kindly.

CONSTANCE.

Having despatched this she felt as though she would be glad to die. Life seemed so flat, and her condition so humiliating. Her love for Emil was dead; the union of their souls was broken; what was there to look forward to? Yet she knew that she must not stop to repine or to indulge in self-pity. The stern necessity of winning bread for her children confronted her and must be faced at once and resolutely. In this she must find happiness and fresh inspiration. It was her duty to close the ears and eyes of her soul to the voices and visions of the past. Hard work would save her brain from giving way, and hard work only. What should that work be? What was she to

do? In the first glow of her pride, revolting at the slight which her husband had put upon her, the way had seemed easy, but viewed in the sober light of reality it bristled with difficulties. Yet now, as she pondered and realized what failure would mean, her spirit rose to meet them, and immediate needs forced sorrow to the background.

Where was she to find work? Since the receipt of her husband's letter everything outside her own emotions had been a blank to her; her gaze had been solely introspective. Conscious now of the need of action and of renewing her contact with the world, she took up the newspaper, yesterday's issue of which lay unopened on the table, and began to examine the page of advertisements for employment. She must find at once something which would provide her with ready money. Only through friends and only after delay could she hope to obtain a kindergarten position; it would take time and instruction to learn typewriting; she was not sufficiently proficient in languages or music to offer herself as a teacher. She could become a domestic servant or a shopgirl. In the former case it would be necessary to board out her children, to give them to some institution, perhaps, a prospect which wrung her heart; in the latter she could be with them at night, but who would look after and guard them during the day? What did other women do whose husbands ran away and left them? The long list of people out of work was appalling, and few of the opportunities offered seemed to fit her circumstances. Someone was seeking employment as a seamstress. She might

take in sewing. This perhaps was the most feasible suggestion. She was handy at plain sewing, and a little practice would doubtless render her skilful. Yes, she would try this, and in order to obtain a start would solicit work from some of the neighbors, if needs be. The neighbors? They did not know as yet of her misfortune—her disgrace, for it was a disgrace to be forsaken by her husband. It would be necessary to tell them. What should she say? Entertaining sadly this necessity of an avowal, she glanced over the rest of the newspaper, and came suddenly upon a paragraph which informed her that her misfortune was already public. Prefaced by offensive headlines, "Emil Stuart disappears from Benham! What has become of Mrs. Morgan's mortgage money?" the wretched story stood exploited to the world. Constance read and the cup of her distress and humiliation overflowed. It needed only this insinuation of dishonesty to complete her misery. Her husband an embezzler? Where should she hide her head? Nor was there comfort in the reporter's closing effort at euphemism: "One or two acquaintances of the late candidate for aldermanic honors, when apprised of his mysterious disappearance, expressed the belief that his seeming irregularities would be explained to the satisfaction of all concerned; but a gentleman, whose name we are not at liberty to disclose, hazards an opinion, based on personal observation, that Mr. Stuart has been premeditating this step for several weeks, and is a fugitive from justice. The circumstance that his wife and two children have been left behind in Benham invites the further inquiry whether he

has also abandoned his family. There are rumors that Mr. Stuart's domestic relations were not altogether harmonious."

Constance let the newspaper slip from her hands. Her cheeks burned with shame. This was the last straw. Her husband a defaulter, and her relations with him the subject of common newspaper gossip. As she stood spell-bound by this new phase of misfortune the door-bell rang. A visitor. Who could it be? Some sympathetic or curious neighbor who had read of her calamities. Or more probably the writer of the newspaper article coming to probe into her misery in search of fresh copy. For a moment she thought that she would not answer the call, and she waited hoping that whoever it was would go away. Again the bell rang, this time sharply. It might be something important, even a telegram from Emil to clear himself. Picking up the newspaper she concealed it hastily, then stepped into the passage and opened the door slightly.

"May I come in?" asked a strong, friendly voice.

"Oh yes, Mr. Prentiss; excuse me," she faltered. She had recognized at once who her visitor was, but so many bewildering things had happened that she stood for a moment irresolute, refusing to credit her own senses. As she opened wide the door, the clergyman strode in fearlessly as though he realized that the situation must be carried by storm. Entering the parlor, he put out his hand and said with manly effusion:

"I have come to ask you to let me help you, Mrs. Stuart."

"Sit down, please. You are very kind. I——" Her words choked her, and she stopped.

"I saw by the newspaper yesterday that you were in trouble. I do not wish to pry into your affairs, but I thought that you might be glad of the counsel of a friend."

His visit was precious balm to her spirit, but, despite her gratitude, the knowledge that he was heaping the traditional coals of fire on her head made her uncomfortable. She had choked from mingled relief and mortification. But now her finer instinct responded to the kindness of his words and she said with simple directness: "I should like to tell you everything, Mr. Prentiss. My husband left a week ago. He does not intend to return. I have a letter from him, and he—he does not wish to live with me any longer. He was willing to support the children, but I could not make up my mind to let them go. Our money is all gone and this house is mortgaged. If you will help me to find work so that I can support them and myself, I shall be very grateful. It was very good of you to come to see me."

The children, attracted by the voice of a stranger, had run in and stood one on either side of their mother staring at him shyly with cherubic eyes. The clergyman said to himself that here was a veritable Madonna of distress—this lithe, nervous-looking woman with her slim figure and soulful face. How pretty and neat she looked in spite of her misery! How engaging were the tones in which she had set forth her calamity! He had always admired her, and it had been a disappointment to him that she had strayed. There was al-

most jubilation in his heart as he heard that she was free from the wretch who had pulled her down; and though he intended to temper the ardor of the priest by the tact of a man of the world, he could not entirely restrain his impulse to stigmatize her husband. "I see," he said. "You are much to be pitied. It is a cruel wrong; the act of a coward. But you must not take your trouble too much to heart, Mrs. Stuart, for the man who will leave a sweet wife and tender children from mere caprice is no real husband and father."

"Mr. Stuart has had much to worry him of late. He has lost money, and been unfortunate in politics." Her impulse was to apologize for her husband even then. "I cannot understand though how he could leave us," she added. After all why should she a second time on Emil's account set her face against the truth in the presence of this true friend? Emil *was* a coward, and his act was a cruel wrong.

But Mr. Prentiss had recovered his aplomb. "I will not distress you by talking about him; he has gone. The matter with which I am concerned is how to help you. We must find you employment at once."

Constance regarded him gratefully. "That is my great requirement just now, Mr. Prentiss. I need work to keep my children from starving and to help me to forget. I am not afraid of work. I shall be glad to do anything for which I am fit."

"I understand, I understand. It is the pride of my church to help just such women as you to help themselves. You need give yourself no concern as to your immediate pecuniary needs. They will

be provided for. I will send the Deaconess to you at once."

The directness of his bounty, the plain intimation that she was a subject for charity brought a flush to her cheeks. But she knew in an instant that it would be false pride to protest. There was no food or money in the house.

"Thank you," she said simply.

Mr. Prentiss divined her reluctance and appreciated the delicacy of her submission. He recognized that this woman with wistful brown eyes and nervous, intelligent face was no ordinary person—was even more deserving than he had supposed, and his thoughts were already busy with the problem of her future. He must find just the right thing for her. "I know, of course, that you wish to become self-supporting as soon as possible," he said. "Will you tell me a little more about yourself and your capabilities? You came to Benham a few months before your marriage to fit yourself to be a kindergarten teacher, if I remember aright?"

During the momentary pause which preceded this inquiry her conscience had been reasserting itself. She had longed for counsel and here it was. If she had erred, there was yet time to repair her fault. "Before we talk of that, may I ask you one question, Mr. Prentiss? I wish to know if you think it was selfish of me to keep both the children. I desire to do what is right this time, whatever it cost me." She clasped her hands resolutely in her lap as though she were nerving herself for a sacrifice. "I hope you will tell me exactly what you think."

The clergyman's heart warmed at this revelation of spiritual vigor. "Here is a soul worth helping," he reflected. Then, in answer to her appeal, he exclaimed with righteous emphasis: "Ask your own heart, my dear woman. Would you dare trust these babies to your husband's keeping? This is a problem of right and wrong, and demands a severing of the sheep from the goats. You may banish that doubt forever."

Constance dropped her eyes to hide the tears of satisfaction which had sprung into them at his words. Her children were safe. The counsel given was the very echo of the test by which she had justified herself toward Emil. "Excuse me," she said in apology for her emotion. Then looking up she added with tremulous brightness, "I felt that I must be sure before anything else was decided. And now to answer your question as to my own capabilities: I have none. I am eager to learn, and I have had some education—my father was fond of books and had a library—but I tell you frankly that there is nothing but the simplest manual work for which I am fitted at the present time. I have thought that all over."

"So far so good. Much of the trouble of this world proceeds from the inability of people to discern for what they are not fitted. Can you sew?"

"I can do plain sewing satisfactorily."

"We will begin with that then. It will keep you busy for the time being. Meanwhile I shall have an opportunity to consider what you had best undertake." He rose and put out his hand with spontaneous friendliness. "Good-by. God bless

you. You are a brave soul, and He will not desert you or leave you comfortless."

Constance quickened at the firm pressure, and her own fingers acknowledged the interest which it expressed. She looked into his eyes with frank confidence. "You have come to me at a time when I needed someone more than ever before in my life. I shall never forget it."

Mr. Prentiss nodded and turned to go as though he would disclaim this expression of everlasting obligation. He felt that he was about his Master's business, and was seeking neither thanks nor praise. Yet, while he deprecated her gratitude, her entire mental attitude caused him ethical and æsthetic satisfaction. The conviction that this ward of the church was worth saving and helping gave elasticity to his step and erectness to his large figure as he strode up the street, knocking now and again some bit of orange peel or other refuse from the sidewalk with a sweep of his cane, which suggested a spirit eager to do battle in behalf of righteousness.

VII

TWO days later the Rev. George Prentiss dined at the house of another of his parishioners, Mrs. Randolph Wilson. She was a widow of about forty-five, the sister of Carleton Howard, reputedly the wealthiest and most sagacious of Benham's financial magnates, and a generous benefactress of St. Stephen's. Her bounty had enabled the rector from time to time to carry out his cherished plans for the æsthetic adornment of the church property. The reredos, two stained-glass windows, and the baptismal font in the enlarged edifice had been provided by her; and in the matter of charity she never failed to respond by munificent subscriptions to the various causes in aid of which he appealed to his congregation. They were friends and allies; interested mutually in St. Stephen's, and interested also, as they both liked to feel, in promoting American civilization outside of church work. Her house, or palace, as it should more properly be termed, a counterpart to that of her brother's which adjoined it, stood in the van of progress, in Benham's fashionable new quarter beyond the River Drive. No pains or expense had been spared to make these mansions impressive and magnificent. Architects of repute had been employed to superintend their construction, and their decorations and furnishings had been chosen in consultation with persons whose

business it was to know the whereabouts of admirable objects of art, and to tempt impecunious noble families abroad to exchange their unique treasures for dazzling round sums of American gold.

Mrs. Wilson could fairly be termed the leader of social activity in Benham, if such a term be compatible with the institutions of a country where every women is supposed to be a law unto herself. Fashions, in the narrow sense of clothes, are in America set by the dressmakers, but what Mrs. Wilson wore was always a matter of moment to women who wished to be in style. She dressed elegantly, and she was able to take liberties with the dressmakers, doing daring things with colors and materials which justified themselves, yet were so individual that they were liable to make guys of those who copied her. Consequently, her wardrobe had a distinction of its own which proclaimed fashion yet defied it. Yet her clothes, striking and superb as they often were, constituted only a small part of her social effectiveness. Her gracious finished manners, and quick, tactful intelligence were the agents of a spirit perpetually eager to be occupied and to lead, and which had found a labor of love in directing what may well be called Benham's æsthetic renaissance.

For Benham's evolution had been no mere growth of bricks and mortar, and no mere triumph in census figures over other centres of population. Even more remarkable and swift than its physical changes had been the transformation in the point of view of its citizens. Twenty years earlier—in 1870, when Mr. Prentiss was a young man just starting in the ministry—he had been one of a

small group of earnest souls interested in awakening the public to a consciousness of the paucity of their æsthetic interests, and to the value of color as a stimulating factor in the every-day life of the community, and as such he had often deplored the aridity of Benham's point of view. In those days the city was virtually a hot-bed of republican simplicity and contempt for social refinements so far as all but a very small percentage of the inhabitants was concerned. Those who built houses larger and finer than their neighbors were few in number and were stigmatized, if not as enemies of the institutions of the country, as purse-proud and frivolous. Hotels were conducted on the theory that what was good enough for the landlord was good enough for the guest, and that malcontents could go elsewhere. In matters appertaining to art, hygiene, education or municipal management, one man's opinion was regarded as equal to any other's, provided he could get the job. Special knowledge was sneered at, and the best patriots in the public estimation were those who did not distrust the ability of the average citizen to produce masterpieces in the line of his or her employment by dint of raw genius untrammelled or unpolluted by the experience of older civilizations. Though solid business men wore solemn-looking black frock-coats and black wisp ties in business hours, to dress again in the evening was looked at askance as undemocratic. It would have been considered an invasion of the rights of the free-born citizen to forbid expectoration in the street cars. Suggestions that the vicious and unregenerate adult pauper poor should not be herded with the young, that

busy physicians should cleanse a lancet before probing a wound, and that sewage should not be emptied into a river used as a source of water supply, were still sniffed at by those in charge of public affairs as aristocratic innovations unworthy the attention of a sovereign people. Architectural beauty both within and without the house was disregarded in favor of monotonous sober hues and solid effects, which were deemed to be suggestive of the seriousness of the national character.

While deploring some of these civic manifestations, Mr. Prentiss had appreciated that the basis of this æsthetic sterility was ethical. When less discerning persons had attributed it solely to ignorance and self-righteous superficiality he had maintained that a puritanical, yet moral and sincere, hostility to extravagance and display was responsible for the preference for ugly architecture and homely upholstery and decoration, and that conscience was the most formidable obstacle to progress. As a priest of a church which fostered beauty and favored rational enjoyment of the fruits of the earth, he had never sympathized with this public attitude, but he had understood and, as an American, respected it.

Now, in the twinkling of an eye, as it were, all was changed, and Benham was in the throes of a revival; a revival which during the last ten years had revolutionized Benham's architecture and Benham's point of view. The public had become possessed by the conviction that they had outgrown their associations and that the standards hitherto revered were out of date and unworthy of a nation and a city pledged to enlighten the

world, upon whom prosperity had been bestowed in large measure. The group of earnest souls who had dared to criticise seemed suddenly to have become a phalanx—numerically unimportant, still, when compared with the whole population, that seething army of industrial wage-earners — but assertive and energetic out of proportion to their numbers. The city had become a hive of reforming activities. Specialists in the arts and humanities were no longer classed as traitors, but were welcomed by a growing clientage as safeguards against bumptious individualism. Though a cheerful optimism in regard to the city's architectural merits still prevailed at large, a silent censorship was at work; substituting, in the business quarter, new mammoth structures adapted to modern industrial needs, erecting in the fashionable quarter, by the aid of American architects trained in Paris, well-built and individual-looking residences. Instead of three or four cheerless, barrack-like caravansaries with sodden cookery, there was a score of modern hotels, the proprietors of which vied with one another in their endeavors to lure patronage by costly and sumptuous innovations. There were comfortable and inviting restaurants. The slap-dash luncheon counter, with its display of pallid pie and one cadaverous chicken, was waning in the popular esteem, in favor of neat spas, at which the rush of patronage was alleviated by clean service and wholesome fare. There were eight theatres, each more spacious and splendid than its predecessor. A frowsy black coat, worn in the forenoon, had ceased to be a badge of patriotism or moral worth, and the community had

become alive to the values of spruceness, color, and comfort in matters of dress. Not only this, but on the streets of Benham there were many stylish equipages with liveried grooms, and in the superb homes which the wealthy citizens had established, there were grand entertainments, where rivalry was rampant and money flowed like champagne. And last, but not least, there was Mrs. Randolph Wilson, the quintessence in her own person of all that was best in this revival in favor of the beautiful things of life, the living embodiment of this newly directed and freshly inspired energy. For well-to-do Benham and Mr. Prentiss liked to believe that the impulse behind these materialistic manifestations was conscience and aspiration, a reaching out for a greater human happiness and a wider human usefulness than had been possible under the old dispensation. This access of lavish philanthropy and study of charitable methods, this zeal of committees promoting new and more thorough methods in hygiene and education, and all the phases of this new awakening in quest of Christian beauty signified to him Benham's—and hence American—originality and fervor refined and spiritualized; Benham's enterprise and independence informed, chastened, and fortified.

And yet there was another side to this whole matter which had haunted Mr. Prentiss much of late, and which was in his thoughts to-night as he sat smoking his cigar after dinner. He had dined sumptuously. Cool oysters, soup of mushrooms, fish smothered in a luscious sauce, cutlets of venison with French beans, little pyramids of *paté de*

foie gras encased in jelly, butter-ball ducks with a salad richly dressed, and a confection of fruit, cream, and pastry, which was evidently a gastronomic specialty of Mrs. Wilson's French cook. He had tasted everything; he had drunk two glasses of champagne, and been pleasantly aware that the cup of black coffee, served after dinner, was an entrancing concoction which his own kitchen did not afford; and he felt that his repast had done him good. It was for him an occasion. Obviously it was for Mrs. Wilson an every-day affair. Moreover, this rich, delicious dinner, served by noiseless servants on choice china, was in harmony with the rest of the magnificent establishment, in harmony with the artistic scheme of color, the soft lustrous draperies, the striking pictures and other masterpieces of art purchased for large sums abroad, and Mrs. Wilson's beautiful toilette and exquisite personality. Here was luxury triumphant and compelling, yet unappeased and seeking fresh opportunities for æsthetic delight; as witness a Millet, an inlaid table, and a Japanese idol in the room in which he sat, all new since he had dined there last.

What a vivid contrast all this to the cheerless often squalid homes which he was accustomed to visit as a rector of Christ's church! The thought which haunted him was that one result of the city's marvellous growth and development had been the accentuation of the distinctions between rich and poor, between class and class in a community where, until lately, there had been theoretically no classes. To be sure he had Mr. Carleton Howard's assertion that there was no country in

the world where the poor man was so well off. This was very likely true, but it did not affect the proposition that the rich were daily growing richer and more self-indulgent. What was to be the limit—the outcome of this renaissance of beauty and comfort, which he had welcomed? Had not the æsthetic reaction almost reached the point where, both as a priest of God and as a good American, it behooved him to cry halt against luxury and extravagance? He frowned at this last reflection for the reason that he was painfully aware that he had fulminated against this sort of thing from the pulpit for years, formerly as part of the clerical formula championing the cause of the spirit against the flesh, and latterly because the Aladdin-like growth of great fortunes all over the land, and conspicuously in his own community, had often suggested the comparison between the passage of a camel through the eye of a needle and the rich man's entrance into the kingdom of heaven as an appropriate text. He had spoken with fervor and sincerity concerning the responsibilities of those having great possessions, and sometimes with living pictures in his mind. Neither Mrs. Wilson nor her brother had ever been among those for whom these admonitions were intended. They had opened their purse-strings liberally to every meritorious cause. The goodly size of their cheques was to him a constant source both of satisfaction and astonishment—astonishment at the new possibilities open to those interested in God's kingdom.

Yet, though he put from him as ungenerous and unnecessary any positive criticism of his hostess,

in the teeth of her many benefactions and her personal activity in social undertakings, he could not help realizing that, in spite of his utterances, the evil which he deprecated was proceeding at a pace which suggested the course of wild-fire. And the worst of it was that he—the church—was so helpless. Great fortunes had been accumulated with a zeal which suggested the inevitable march of destiny—a law which seemed almost to mock the spirit of Christ—and, even while he was musing, the city had become a theatre of industrial contrasts, with the pomp and pride of life in the centre of the stage and poverty and distress in the ample background. There recurred to him the traditional image of the curate of his faith—the Church of England—cringing before or patronized by the titled worshippers of Mammon. This, at least, he could resent as impossible in his case—he had never hesitated to speak his mind to any of his parishioners, however important—still, the reminder was disconcerting and a challenge to his conscience. Nor was the reflection that this wave of luxury, this more and more exacting reverence for material comforts, was a part of the movement of the century, and was common to all civilized countries, a solace. He was an American, but first of all, he was a servant of the church, and the church was the beacon of civilization. Was she doing her work, if these terrible inequalities were to continue? What was to be the outcome of this zest for luxurious personal comfort?

To what extent the church ought to take part in the economic regeneration of the world was one of the questions which Mr. Prentiss had always

found perplexing. He was well aware that his parishioners as a body were not fond of hearing him preach on what they called secular subjects. So long as he confined himself to enumerating spiritual truths, they were not averse to his illustrating his stigmas upon sin by generalizations from current worldly abuses; but he knew that many shook their heads and declared that the cobbler should stick to his last when he ventured to discourse on political topics or the relations of labor and capital. Mr. Prentiss was not aware, however, that some of this prejudice proceeded from the circumstance that he was apt to lose his head on such occasions; but, on the other hand, much of it was genuine disinclination for advice from the pulpit on subjects which, to quote the women parishioners, were not spiritual, and, to quote the men, were none of his business. His congregation was almost entirely composed of pew owners, people with vested rights, among which appeared to be the right not to be harrowed by socialistic doctrines. They were ready to help the poor in any way which he would suggest, and they had supplied him with a mission church where he could reach the ignorant and needy more effectively, but they argued that he had better leave to the politicians all suggestions tending to disturb the existing industrial order.

Mr. Prentiss sometimes sighed over these limitations, but he had become used to them, and in a measure, with advancing years, he had, in his endeavor to be a man of the world in order to remain a more useful Christian, accepted the doctrine that he had no plan to substitute for the present eco-

nomic system, and that he must make the best of the existing situation. So, in practical, daily life, he exhorted the rich to give their money and themselves to the advancement of their fellow men, and the poor to shun vice and bear their privations with patience, while he held forth the promise of the church of an existence hereafter for the pure in heart where all the seeming inconsistencies of this mortal life would be explained and justified. Not being endowed with much sense of humor, Mr. Prentiss, as he waxed in years, and St. Stephen's became the fashionable church of the city, had found less and less difficulty in accommodating himself to this point of view, and in devoting all his ardor to reclaiming souls for Christ. After all, was not his mission to help men and women as he found them? First of all to minister to their souls, and in the name of Christianity to lift them from the slough of human suffering and misfortune that he might expound to them the loving mercies of the Lord? The things of the earth were not the things of the spirit, and he was more tenacious than in his youth of the prerogatives of the church as an institution controlling human consciences by standards of its own, founded on the teachings of the Prince of Peace. Nevertheless, being reasonably clear-headed and fearless, he was not without the suspicion at times that this reasoning was mystical, and in the face of facts he had every now and then his unpleasant quarters of an hour.

This was one of them to-night. His hostess, when the dinner was over, had left him to a cigar and his own devices in the library. He was to join her presently and be shown her daughter's

wedding presents. He had been invited to dine in order that he might see them, but Mrs. Wilson and he both knew that this was an excuse for a quiet evening together in which they might compare notes concerning their mutual interests. Reaching out to knock off the ash of his cigar into a dainty porcelain wheelbarrow, he noticed a new photograph on the mantel-piece and rose to examine it. He recognized it as one of Clarence Waldo, the New Yorker to whom Miss Lucille Wilson was betrothed. The sight of this young man's countenance did not serve to restore Mr. Prentiss's serenity. On the contrary, he stood gazing at the photograph with an expression which suggested that his soul was still perturbed. The face was that of a man of twenty-seven or eight with delicate features—thin lips, a long nose and an indefinable haughtiness of expression which was made up of weariness and disdain. He had large eyes which lacked lustre, and his sparse hair gave the effect of having been carefully brushed. The clergyman had met him only a few times, and Mr. Prentiss had never forgotten the first occasion, which was at Lucille's coming-out ball three years before. He had happened to find himself in Mr. Waldo's path when the young man was in the act of carrying everything before him with a plate of salad for his partner, and he had never forgotten the cold impertinence of the New Yorker's stare. Paul Howard, Lucille's cousin, who witnessed the encounter, said afterward that Clarence had given Mr. Prentiss the dead eye, which was a telling description of the stoniness of the fashionable New Yorker's gaze. Mr. Prentiss had never

heard this diagnosis, but he had remembered the episode. He regarded it, however, merely as additional evidence of the lack of reverence on the part of the young men of the day—and the young women, too, for the matter of that—not merely for sacred things, but for everything and everybody which were in their way or did not happen to appeal to their fancy. But though he considered this absence of social politeness as one of the cardinal failings of the age, his present thoughts regarding Lucille's future husband were not concerned with it.

Since the engagement had been announced four months ago he had been making inquiries, and the information which he had received was in his mind and troubled his soul as a corollary of the other problems which had just been haunting him. It was not of a character to justify him in forbidding the bans—not even in remonstrating with Mrs. Wilson, unless she were to ask his advice or provide him with an opportunity. But he deplored sincerely that this young man was to marry his friend's daughter. Was this to be the outcome, the crowning of the wealth of love and solicitude which had been lavished on this only child—a child brought up in his church? Was it for this that Lucille had been made the central figure of costly entertainments for the last three years, in the hope that she might make a brilliant match? Decidedly, it was a puzzling world, and circumstances seemed to be conspiring to cloud his horizon and disturb his digestion at a time when he ought to be enjoying himself and taking his ease.

"What does he offer her?" he said to himself.

"Twelve months of sporting life—American sporting life. A superb stable, a four-in-hand coach and steam yacht, polo, golf, the horse show, cards, six months every third year in Europe, their summers at Newport, their winters at Palm Beach. The fortune which she will bring him will enable them to live in the lap of luxury all the year round, and he will teach her to regard those who are not rich and who do not imitate their manner of life as beneath their notice. I know the kind—I know the kind."

Soft footsteps interrupted his mental soliloquy. "No, thank you," he exclaimed in a tone which was almost militant to the waiters who approached him with a tray. Mr. Prentiss supposed that another form of stimulant was being offered him, for Madeira, liqueurs and coffee had been successively brought in and solemnly presented to him by the two men servants, one of whom seemed to him as superfluous as a plumber's helper. Then as his gaze, which had been inward, appreciated that the silver gilt tumbler contained apollinaris water, he called them back and emptied the glass. He had finished his cigar and it was time to rejoin his hostess.

VIII

MR. PRENTISS continued his monologue on his way to the drawing-room. He imagined himself saying to Mrs. Wilson, "You know that I believe in toleration, and that I would not set or preach an ascetic standard of life. I believe —my church believes—that it is not profitable to the human soul to mortify the flesh in every-day life or refuse to enjoy the comforts of civilization. But the set of people to which this young man belongs are cumberers of the soil and a menace to society. It is not merely a question of taste, but of Christian morals. We have nothing to do with other nations; our concern is with the social life of this nation and whether we are to foster and encourage a pleasure-loving, self-indulgent, and purposeless leisure class."

Yet though his thoughts thus shaped themselves in fervent words, he was conscious that in the absence of a cue his lips must remain sealed. There was a limit imposed by society on the priestly office which he could not overstep without appearing officious, and thus weakening his influence. Were it a case of notorious dissipation or some palpable fault or blemish, it would be his duty to speak. But he had no such data at his command. Clarence Waldo was simply a fastidious idler, pretentious, and indifferent to the vital interests of life.

It could not even be charged that he was marrying Lucille for her money, as he had a competency of his own. They would be able to buy all the dogs and horses in the country if they saw fit. But his own tongue was tied. To all appearances Mrs. Wilson was content. At the time she had announced her daughter's engagement to him, she had said, in response to his earnest inquiry if she were satisfied—said it with a blithe smile, as though, on the whole, the best had happened—"I should have been glad of course, if Lucille had chosen a man of conspicuous talent, a future United States Senator or successful artist or author. If she had loved her lord, I should not have objected to a title, because, after all, even to a free-born American, there is a certain compensation in becoming the mother of dukes and regenerating an ancient line. But Clarence is well connected, and the child is in love with him. So long as she is happy, that is the essential thing."

Since then he had become better informed as to the young man's tendencies. But if Lucille was in love with him, and her mother acquiescent, what was there to do? The church could not interfere beyond a certain point without giving offence.

Mrs. Wilson was not in the drawing-room, but Mr. Prentiss caught a glimpse of her at her desk in a smaller room which led out of it. She called to him that she was answering a note and would join him presently. The clergyman seated himself and picking up from a low teak table beside him a paper-cutter fashioned on a Japanese sword hilt he compressed his fingers on the handle as an outlet to his perplexity. Had he been walking in the

fields, he would have cut off the heads of the dandelions with his cane. Marriage was a sacrament, the most solemn undertaking in life, yet how impossible it was to regulate matrimony for others. He glanced around the room admiringly. Already the musical notes of his hostess's voice had served to dissipate partially the miasma of doubt which had been assailing him. This main apartment was one of a series of drawing-rooms, each furnished with an exquisite magnificence suggestive of the salons of France in the days of Louis XIV, save that there was a superabundance of artistic furnishings; hence the sight was confused by the array of costly tapestries, marbles, bronzes, china, and gilt or otherwise illuminated ornaments which almost contended for space with one another, though the rooms were of large proportions. One feature of Benham's renaissance was the ambition to outdo the past in size and gorgeousness, but Mrs. Wilson's advisers had been animated also by the desire for artistic success, and it was only in its wealth of material that their and her—for she had been the leading spirit after all—performance was open to criticism. Here in Benham, where twenty years before the horse-hair sofa was still an object of admiring regard in the homes of the well-to-do, the desert had blossomed with the rose, and a veritable palace had been established. And, as Mr. Prentiss reflected, joining his finger-tips across his waist-band, all this lavish expenditure meant the return by the rich of accumulated wealth into circulation for the benefit of those who labored for their bread, which was another of Mr. Carleton Howard's telling truths.

The swift, animated, but noiseless glide of Mrs. Wilson into the room and onto a sofa, from which she flashed at him a gracious, electric look of attention with the words, "And now, my friend, I am entirely at your disposal. It was a note which had to be answered at once"—restored Mr. Prentiss's serenity. She was one of those pleasant persons in whose presence the world seems justified. When she entered a room people were apt to pay tribute by a pause in whatever they were doing, and she became the focus of attention. The effect of her graceful energy was largely responsible for this, suggesting the forceful but silent sweep of a ship. She had lost the figure and the countenance of youth, but though her abundant crinkly hair was grizzled no one ever thought of her age except to observe that she was handsomer than as a younger woman. She had never been a beauty; she was now a distinguished looking, comely, and effective matron. She was tall and rather willowy, but not thin, with a proud, resolutely carried head, an agreeable straight nose, short rather than long (her best feature), a spirited, sympathetic smile, eyes fundamentally gray, which changed as her thoughts changed, and ingratiating but elegant manners. Her face, notably the cheeks and lips, was a trifle full, suggesting dimples, and possibly to the critical a too-manifest desire to please. Her obvious pose—which, though deliberate was entirely genuine—was to be exquisite, sympathetic, and intellectual, and for the expression of this range of qualities she had serviceable allies in her musical voice, a bewitching way of showing just enough of her teeth, when she became vivacious,

and her ornamental clothes, which always suited her. On this evening she wore an old-gold gown with jet and lace accompaniments, an aigrette of crimson gauze with which the plumage of her fan was in harmony, a band of magnificent pearls around her neck, and on her breast, though such ornaments were not strictly in fashion, a large brooch of fine workmanship containing a miniature of two children of tender age. Of these children one had died shortly after the miniature was painted, the other was her daughter Lucille. Her soul was dedicated to two interests, her joy and ambition as a mother, and to the cause of social human progress.

Mrs. Wilson had been for fifteen years a widow, and, though her husband held a hallowed place in her heart, even she was conscious that the broad scope of her present life dated from the period when, seeking a refuge from her own grief and loneliness, she had welcomed diverse social employment. Her husband, Randolph, a hero and a colonel of the Civil War, had claimed her on his return as a bride. They were ardent lovers, and they had never ceased to be so, certainly not in theory. Some of Mrs. Wilson's knowing friends were fond of insinuating, when the humor for gossip prevailed, that he had died just in time, which was their way of intimating that she had outgrown him. But these dissectors of hearts did not perhaps sufficiently remember that her own blossoming forth into the woman she now was had been subsequent to her husband's death. Nor did they take sufficiently into account the bewildering course of events which had attended her progress. Colo-

nel Wilson, a man of small means at the time of their marriage, had become her brother's partner. The properties in which he was interested at the time of his death had subsequently proved so valuable that she had found herself presently the possessor of a million, a sum which had quadrupled in the keeping of her brother, Carleton Howard, one of the most powerful financiers in the country. Opportunity surely had waited on her widening aspirations, enabling her finally to establish herself in this magnificent home surrounded by all the æsthetic attractions and many of the treasures of modern civilization.

Probably Mrs. Wilson herself had never sought to analyze the past by the light of the present, realizing, as we all do, that life unbeknown to us has halting-places which become, as we look back, the dividing lines between what are almost separate existences. Though at her husband's death she had made no resolutions regarding the future, she had never felt the impulse to marry again, so engrossing were the concerns of motherhood and social responsibility.

"You spoke at dinner of wishing my assistance in some case in which you are interested. Will you tell me about it now before we look at the presents?" Mrs. Wilson continued with smiling interest.

"Ah, yes." Mr. Prentiss was glad to have this recalled to his mind. There was no chance here for doubt or perplexity. "It is rather out of the usual run of charity cases. The personality of the woman, I mean. The circumstance that her husband has run away and left her penniless, with two

young children to support is, alas! only too common."

"Poor thing! How can I be of service?"

"The woman—her name is Mrs. Stuart—notwithstanding her disastrous marriage, seems to me distinctly superior. She came to Benham some six or seven years ago, and I knew her a little at St. Stephen's before she was a wife. Indeed, I married them, and made some inquiries at the time concerning the husband's circumstances, but learned nothing to his discredit. She has found him to be a godless, unscrupulous person with drinking habits, and recently he has deserted her on the grandiose plea that they would be happier apart. She will be happier; I am sure of that; but I have been exercised as to how to enable her to become self-supporting. She is called to higher usefulness than scrubbing or plain sewing, but though I have discerned in her capabilities and refinement, she is not at present equipped for any active employment."

"Which only tends to show, my friend, that every woman"—Mrs. Wilson paused an instant—"every woman who has not independent means of her own, I mean, should be educated to be self-supporting—should have some definite bread-winning occupation which would render her independent of the man she marries in case he dies or misbehaves. I was thinking the other day that a society formed to advocate this doctrine before clubs of girls as a condition of marriage would prove efficacious."

Mr. Prentiss nodded. "It is certainly the duty of Christian society to provide additional safeguards against the consequences of improvident

wedlock. In this particular instance, the young woman plighted her troth while she was studying to become a kindergarten teacher. She was a country doctor's daughter, and is gentle and refined, as well as intelligent in appearance—one of those lithe, tense American personalities in which the spirit appears to burn at the expense of the body, but which, like the willow, bend but do not break under the stress of life."

"She sounds interesting, and I do not see that she has been to blame. We must raise a fund for her. With how large a subscription shall I head the list?" Though Mrs. Wilson gave freely on merely charitable grounds, she gave with more enthusiasm when the objects of her bounty had not offended her sense of the social fitness of things.

The clergyman put out his hand. "That wouldn't do exactly, I think. She is not too proud to let us help her for a few weeks with coal and groceries until she can earn for herself. She realizes that she must be sensible, if only for the children's sake. She has an independent simplicity of nature and clearness of perception which would stand in the way, I fear, of her accepting a donation such as you have in mind; though I should dearly love to allow you to pay off the encumbrances on their house, which, owing to her husband's rascalities have eaten up her little home—her patrimony. But I am sure she would refuse."

"I see. We should think less of her if she allowed herself to be pauperized, much as I should enjoy giving her a deed of her home free and clear—the mere thought of it causes me a thrill of pleasure. But the worst of such tragedies is that

we are most powerless to aid those who are most deserving." Mrs. Wilson leaned back among her cushions, and, drawing a pale pink rose from a bunch in a vase at her elbow, laid it along her cheek and inhaled its fragrance. "If she were an undiscerning, common spirit with workaday sensibilities, as so many of them are, she would not refuse, but—half the pleasure of giving would be lost. It is a privilege and the fashion to be charitable, but so much of our charity consists in filling the mouths and clothing the bodies of the wretched who will never be appreciably different or strive to be different from what they are."

"The poor we have always with us," murmured the clergyman.

"Always. The shiftless, dirty, unaspiring, unæsthetic poor. The dregs and lees of human endeavor. We must feed and clothe them, of course, and help them to help themselves, but sometimes I forget the pathos of it all in the ugliness and squalor. Consequently, when the chance to do real good comes, it is a pity not to be able to lift the burden completely. What, then, can I do for this young person?"

"I have thought over her case for the last forty-eight hours, and have come to the conclusion that, as she has no special training, her best chance for employment is to learn short-hand and to use the typewriter. I understand that women proficient in this vocation can usually secure steady work at a fair wage. Though Mrs. Stuart would be unwilling to accept a direct gift of money, I feel confident that she would not refuse to let us put her in the position to become self-supporting—that is,

defray the cost of the lessons necessary to make her a competent stenographer or office clerk. And I thought you might be glad to pay for these lessons—a matter of six months or so."

Mr. Prentiss had taken up the paper-cutter again, and he passed the flat of the metal blade across his palm as though he were smoothing out his plan as well as the creases.

"Gladly," she responded. "For as long as you desire. And, perhaps, when she has learned what is necessary, my brother may know of some opening for her down-town."

"Very likely," answered Mr. Prentiss, with resonant acquiescence. "The same thought had occurred to me."

"And, in the meantime, since you tell me that she is competent and refined, my secretary, who will have her hands full with the details of the wedding, may be able to give her occasional errands to do. You may tell her to call when her plans are adjusted and to ask for me."

"Excellent. And we shall both be your debtors."

Mrs. Wilson smiled graciously, showing the dimples in her cheeks. The demands made upon her for pecuniary aid were of daily, it might be said hourly, occurrence. Whoever in Benham was in search of money applied to her, and the post brought her solicitations from all sorts of people, among whom were the undeserving or importunate, as well as the needy or humanitarian. As lady bountiful, she purposed to exercise intelligent discrimination in her charities, and she accepted thanks as a tribute to that quality.

"Come," she said, rising, "I will show you the

presents. Only think, four hundred of them, and so many beautiful things! People have been so kind. Several of my brother's friends in New York have sent most exquisite tokens—a necklace of diamonds and pearls from Mr. Fenton the banker, a gold dessert service from his railroad ally, Mr. Kennard."

She led the way from the drawing-room suite into the hall, where electricity in artistic guises illuminated the broad panellings, a splendid Teniers and three or four bronze or marble statuaries of rare merit, and up the stair-case to the next floor into what was known as the morning-room—an apartment where Mrs. Wilson conducted her affairs and did her reading and thinking. This was a combination of study and æsthetic boudoir. There were seductive sofas and quaint capacious chairs supplied with brightly colored cushions, and dainty draperies, all in silken stuffs of patterns reminiscent of the Orient. Art, in its most delicate and spiritual forms, breathed from every object of furniture or decoration; from the small pictures—some in oils, some in water-colors—which merited and often demanded the closest scrutiny; from the few vases of entrancing shape and hue, from the interesting photographs in beautiful frames, from the curious and rare memorials of travel and wise choice of what cunning fingers had wrought with infinite labor. As in the rest of the house, there was still too much wealth of material, too much scintillation and conglomeration of color, but the intent had been—and not without success—to produce a more subtle atmosphere than prevailed outside, as of an inner temple. Prominent

in one angle stood Mrs. Wilson's desk, rose-wood, inlaid with poetic gilt tracery, and littered with the correspondence of a busy woman. Books and other articles of daily use lying here and there without effort at order gave to the room the air of being the intimate abode of a human soul. Opening out of this was a private music-room, which was used by Mrs. Wilson and her daughter in preference to the large music-room on the street floor intended for musical parties and dances. Here were the wedding presents, a dazzling array of gold, silver, jewels, glass, china, and ornamental knick-knacks, tastefully arranged on tables introduced for the purpose. As they entered an attendant withdrew into the hall.

"We have thought it more prudent to have a watchman on guard by night and day," explained Mrs. Wilson; "for I suppose it is true, as one of those ridiculous newspaper items asserts, that these gifts represent at least one hundred thousand dollars. By the way," she continued, with a gentle sigh, "it is so difficult to know what attitude to adopt with the newspaper people. If one refuses them the house, their sensibilities are hurt and they are liable to invent falsehoods or write disagreeable paragraphs. If they are allowed to inspect everything, they publish details which make one's heart sick, and make one appear a vain fool. How is a person in my position to be courteous toward the power of the press and yet to maintain the right to privacy? Is not this superb?" she added, holding up a crest of diamonds in the form of a tiara. "My brother's present to Lucille."

"Beautiful—beautiful, indeed," murmured the

clergyman. The sight of all these costly things was bewildering to his mind as well as to his eyes. "Ah, the press—the press, it is a problem, indeed. We would seem to have the right to individual privacy, would we not? And yet in this age of ours, pressure is so often used upon us to thrust our wares into the shop-windows—as in my case, sermons for newspapers of the most sensational class—on the plea of a wider usefulness, a closer touch with the wilderness of souls, that it is difficult to know where the rights of the public end as to what one has. What would seem to be vanity may often be only another form of philanthropy. And yet——"

"And yet," interposed Mrs. Wilson, as she singled out an enchanting fan of gold and ivory and the most exquisite lace and spread it for his inspection, "why should I pander to the vulgar curiosity of the public? It is none of their business."

"In a matter of this kind I quite agree with you. If they could see all these beautiful things, there might be some sense in it; but that would be out of the question, of course."

"That will be the next step; our houses thrown open to the madding crowd. Six newspapers—two from New York—applied recently for leave to see the presents. I intended to refuse firmly, but to my astonishment Lucille seemed disappointed. It never occurred to me that she would not hate the publicity. She gave a little shriek and said, 'Mamma, how dreadful!' and then added in the next breath, 'Everybody does it, and, as something is sure to be printed, might it not be better to make certain that it's correct?' A day

or two later she was photographed in her tiara, and from what has transpired since I fear that the idea of publicity was not foreign to her thought. My child, Mr. Prentiss! Only think of it! One can never quite understand the point of view of the rising generation. I consulted Carleton, and he grew successively irate, contemplative, philosophical, and weak-kneed. In short, a week ago a reportorial woman, with the social appetite of a hyena and the keen-eyed industry of a ferret, passed the forenoon in the house and went away with a photograph of Lucille in the tiara. And what is worst of all, in spite of my humiliation at the whole proceeding, I am decidedly curious to see what she has written."

The sound of voices in the morning-room broke in upon this confession. "Ah, here you are, Aunt Miriam! I have brought you an artistic masterpiece with a felicitous biography of the distinguished heroine. Behold and admire!"

The speaker was Paul Howard, Mrs. Wilson's nephew. He advanced from the doorway with radiant, teasing face, holding out a newspaper at which he pointed delightedly. At his heels followed Lucille and Clarence Waldo, she protesting, yet betraying by her laughing confusion that her indignation was half-hearted; he stalking with self-important gravity save for a thin smile, the limit of his deliberate contributions to the gayety of nations unless under the influence of alcoholic conviviality. At men's gatherings there was a stage in the proceedings when Clarence Waldo became decorously mellow and condescended—indeed, expected to be asked—to sing one of three or four

quasi-humorous ditties at his command, a function which he seemed to regard as an important social contribution and for which he practised in secret. Also, after luncheon or dinner, he was liable to lay down the law in loud tones in regard to current sporting affairs. But his habitual manner was languid and his expression cold, as though he feared to compromise himself by interest or enthusiasm. He was very tall. In the centre of his crown was a bald spot. He stooped slightly, and, except among his intimates, looked straight before him lest he might see someone whom he did not wish to know. In the rear of this family party came Carleton Howard, stepping firmly yet deliberately, as he always did, as though he walked abreast of Time, not tagging at her skirts like so many of his contemporaries—a fine figure of a man approaching sixty, with a large body, but not corpulent, a broad brow, a strong, defiant nose, iron-gray hair and a closely cut iron-gray mustache, clear, fearless, yet reflective eyes, and a mouth the pleasant tension of which indicated both determination and tact. He was smoking a cigar, and had come in from his own library to enjoy the bearding of his sister by the young people.

IX

BEFORE Mrs. Wilson could ascertain what it was, Lucille made a dash at the newspaper. Paul thrust it behind his back.

"Give it to me, Paul," demanded the young woman, imperiously. "I order you to give it to me," she reiterated, tapping her foot. "You are a hateful tease."

"Surely, my fair cousin, you're not going to deprive your mother of the satisfaction of gazing on this work of art, and reading this appreciative description of your personal charms? Can you not see how impatient she is to have it all to herself?"

"You have certainly whetted my curiosity, Paul," said Mrs. Wilson.

"I forbid you to show it to her."

"Why?"

"It is too ridiculous and foolish, and the picture—" Her criticism on that score instead of seeking words culminated in another spring, which Paul evaded by wheeling spryly about so that he still faced her.

Paul Howard was an ornamental, attractive specimen of athletic, optimistic American youth; a fine animal of manly, well-knit proportions with no sign of physical weakness or of effeminacy in his person or his face. His countenance was open and ruddy; his eyes clear blue, his hair light brown.

"Give it to me, Paul," demanded the young woman imperiously

His lip was scrupulously clean-shaven, exposing the full, pleasant strength of his father's mouth. Indeed, in conformity with the prevailing fashion among his contemporaries, he wore neither mustache, beard, nor whiskers, as though in immaculate protest against every style of hirsute ornamentation, from the goat-like beard of Methodistical statesmanship to the spruce mustache and well-trimmed whiskers of men of the world of fifteen years earlier. He was a Harvard graduate; he had been on the foot-ball team, and a leading spirit in the social life of the college; had been around the globe since graduation, and spent nearly a year shooting big game in the Rockies and getting near to nature, as he called it, by living on a ranch. All this as preliminary to taking advantage of the golden spoon which was in his mouth at his birth. At twenty-three he had signified that he was ready to buckle down to the responsibilities of guarding and increasing the family possessions, an announcement delighting his father's heart, who had feared, perhaps, lest his only son might conclude to become merely a clubman or a poet. This was the fourth year of his novitiate, much of which had been spent in New York, where Mr. Howard, though his home was in Benham, had established a branch of his banking-house, at the head of which he intended presently to place Paul. On the young man's twenty-fifth birthday the magnate had made him a present of a million dollars so as to put him on his feet and permit him to support a wife. If this were a hint, Paul had taken it. Though absorbed in financial undertakings of magnitude (which

had included the electric street-car combination hostile to the aspirations of Emil Stuart), he had wooed and wed one of the prettiest girls in Benham, and he possessed, not many blocks away, a stately establishment of his own. He was accustomed to walk hand in hand with prosperity, and this habit was reflected in the gay and slightly self-satisfied quality of his manliness.

After foiling his cousin for a few moments, with a tantalizing smile, a new idea occurred to him. He held out the newspaper, saying, "Very well then, here it is. I dare you, Lucille, to destroy it. Nothing would induce you to part with it."

Lucille snatched the sheet from his hand, and her ruffled hesitation indicated that to destroy it was the last thing she had intended. In another instant she tore the newspaper into strips with an air of disdain and cast them on the floor. Delighted at the success of his taunt, Paul stooped and gathering the fragments began to piece them together.

"That is only a blind. She knows she can buy a dozen copies to-morrow. Listen, Aunt Miriam, to this gem which I have rescued: 'The fair bride has a complexion of cream of alabaster, with beautiful almond-shaped eyes, and hair of black lustre, which, rising from her forehead in queenly bands, seems the natural throne of the glittering diadem in the picture, one of her choicest bridal gifts.' Could anything be more exquisite and fetching?" He gave a laugh which was almost a whoop of exultation.

"No matter, Lucille," said Mrs. Wilson, com-

ing to her daughter's rescue. "It is only envy on Paul's part. The newspapers did not make half so much of his wedding." In her own heart she did not approve of the publicity, but the sense of importance which it conveyed was not without its effect even on her. Besides, the personal description, though florid in style, was to her maternal eyes not an exaggerated estimate of her daughter's charms.

"The writer was evidently under the spell of her subject," said Mr. Prentiss, gallantly. Though tolerant of banter, especially at clerical gatherings, and partial to Paul Howard as one of the young men whom he desired to draw into closer union with the church, the idea of the possibilities of the newspaper as a dispenser of benefits was still in his mind, and served to minimize the vanity, if any, of his friend's daughter.

"Quite naturally, Mr. Prentiss," retorted the tormenting Paul, "for the subject gave a private audience to the writer only a few days ago."

Paul spoke from the desire to tease, not because he objected actively to the connivance of his cousin with the designs of the press. If the opportunity to do away with the whole practice of prying into and advertising private social matters had been presented to him, he would gladly have embraced it, and welcomed at the same time the further opportunity to tar and feather or duck the race of social reporters. But as an astute and easy-going American he recognized the prevalence of the habit, and though personally he tried to dodge with good humor the impertinent inquiries of press agents, he was not disposed to censure those who

yielded to their importunities. Indeed, Paul Howard was so bubbling over with health prosperity, and a generally roseate conception of life as he saw it, that he shrank from active criticism of existing social conditions. He was a strong patriot, and it pleased him to believe that Americans were world-conquerors and world-teachers. Hence that it was the part of good Americans to join hands all round and, avoiding nice strictures, to put their shoulders to the wheel of progress.

"How absurd you are, Paul," answered Lucille. "That woman badgered me with questions, and was positively pathetic into the bargain, for she confided to me that she hated the whole business, but that her bread and butter depended on it. She was certain to write something, and so rather than have everything wrong, I told her a few things."

"And gave her your photograph in the tiara."

"She asked for it. She saw it lying on the table. Wasn't that better than to be caricatured by some snap-shot with a camera?"

The dire results of what would have ensued had she been less accommodating seemed so convincing to Lucille as she recited them that her tone changed from defence to conviction.

"I know a woman," said Clarence Waldo, "who told her servants not to let any of those newspaper beggars inside the house, and what do you suppose happened? On the day of the wedding there appeared an insulting account of the affair with everything turned topsy-turvy and disparaging remarks about both families. It's an awful bore, but when people of our sort are mar-

ried the public doesn't like to be kept in the dark, you know."

"There! You see!" exclaimed Lucille, triumphantly.

The description of this young lady which her cousin had read was fundamentally correct. Her eyes could scarcely be called almond-shaped, but their curves were more gradual than those of most American women, a feature which, in conjunction with her thin lips and thin, pointed nose, gave to her countenance an expression of fastidiousness, which was characteristic. She was an example of the so-called Gibson girl, with a tall and springy, yet slight, figure, and a race-horse air which suggested both mettle and disdain. She had been brought up on the theory of free development—a theory for which not her mother but the tendency of the day was responsible. Parents, when it comes to a choice in educational methods, are apt at heart to recognize their own personal ignorance, and those with the highest aims for their offspring are most likely to adopt the newest fashionable graft on human experience. We are perpetually on the look-out for discoveries which will enable our children to become the bright particular stars which we are not. So what more natural than that Mrs. Wilson, with her ardent bent for improving social conditions, should swallow—hook, bait, and sinker—the theory that the budding intelligence should be cajoled and humored, not thwarted and coerced? The idea thus pursued at kindergarten, that everything should be made easy and agreeable for the infant mind, had been steadily adhered to, and Lucille could

fairly be said to have had her own way all her life. This own way had been at times bewildering, not to say disheartening, to her mother. Mrs. Wilson had expected and yearned for a soulful, aspiring, poetic daughter with an ambition for culture—herself, but reincarnated and much improved. Instead, Lucille had showed herself to be utterly indifferent to poetry, lukewarm in regard to culture, almost matter of fact in her mental attitude, and sedulously enamoured of athletic pursuits. She had a fancy for dogs. From fifteen to eighteen she had followed golf, tennis, and boating, hatless and with her sleeves rolled up to her elbows, a free and easy and rather mannerless maiden, Amazon-like in her bearing, but unlike an Amazon in that she was a jolly companion to the boys, who called her promiscuously by her Christian name, as she did them by theirs. Does such a process of familiarity dull the edge of romance? We do not yet know. Each rising generation provides new problems for the wise elders, and this was one of those which had kept Mrs. Wilson uneasy.

She had looked forward to Lucille's formal introduction to society as a social corrective, and argued that, as soon as her daughter met the world face to face, there would be a modification both of Lucille's tastes and point of view. So strong is the emphasis laid by American mothers in fashionable society on what is called "the coming out" of their daughters that the concern engendered by the approach of the ordeal could fitly be described as a phase of hysteria. The true perspective of life becomes utterly and absurdly dis-

torted by apprehension lest the dear child should not have "a good time" and by a fierce ambition that she should have a better "time" than her mates. As a consequence, competition—that absorbing passion of American character—is prone to take advantage of all the opportunities at its command, not merely to decorate the unprepossessing or provide the duck with the environment of the swan, but to make princesses out of goose girls by sheer gorgeous manifestations of the power of the almighty dollar. We all know that every woman in the world would prefer at heart to be called wicked rather than common, unless she were common—one of those extraordinary results of the tyranny of the social instinct which plays havoc with religious codes; and there is probably no country where the most socially adept are more intolerant of commonness than in democratic America—a fact which should be disconcerting to that form of socialism which yearns for a dead-level. Yet the tendency to exploit one's daughters by means of money and to exploit them even with barbaric splendor is current among our most socially sophisticated people.

Mr. Carleton Howard's "coming-out" ball for his niece was the most splendid function which Benham had ever known, and for the next three years Lucille's life had been one round of social gayety, emphasized by the character of the things done in her behalf by her family, which were severally executed, if not conceived, in a spirit of emulation, though Mrs. Wilson would doubtless have resented the impeachment. Mrs. Wilson would have put the blame on the tendency of the

age, arguing that American society was becoming more and more exacting in its æsthetic demands, and that one must conform to existing usage in order to lead. But an examination of the facts would reveal that whatever form of entertainment was given by her for Lucille, as, for instance, the four colored luncheons, when the food and the table ornaments were successively red, orange, blue, and heliotrope, and four sets of twelve young girls stuffed themselves through eight courses at mid-day, was carried out with a lavish accentuation of new and costly effects. It was currently recognized that at her house the cotillion favors and the prizes at games were worth having —silver ornaments, pretty fans, things of price— always a step beyond the last fashion, as though the world would not be content to stand still, but must be kept moving by more and more expensive social novelties.

Though three years of this life had served to transform the mannerless Amazon into a socially correct and fastidious young woman, the result, nevertheless, was a secret disappointment to her mother, who had hoped that Lucille would develop intellectual or æsthetic tastes under the influence of these many advantages. But what can a mother whose daughter prefers athletics to art, and fox terriers to philanthropy, do but make the best of it? Lucille had a will of her own and seemed to know exactly what she wished, which included marrying Clarence Waldo. To thwart her would be useless, to quarrel with her was out of the question. The only thing was to give her as brilliant a wedding as possible and hope for

the best. And after all, the best was by no means out of the question. Lucille was young and was going to New York. There was no telling what a girl of twenty-one, with large means and the best social opportunities, might not become by the time she was thirty-five. Mrs. Wilson had herself cast sheep's eyes at New York as a residence before building her new house, but she had decided to remain dominant in a small puddle. There were compensations in doing so. She flattered herself that in this age of telephones and telepathy she was able to keep in touch with the metropolis and to get her social cues accordingly. But to have a daughter there would be interesting, provided all went well. The proviso should not be overlooked; for Mrs. Wilson had not lowered her own standards. She was merely trying to extract all the maternal comfort and pride she could out of the existing situation.

"But, my dear Lucille," said Paul, intending a crushing blow to his cousin's returning assurance, "if you were really so anxious to escape notoriety, you had merely to mention it to father. A word from him would have silenced every newspaper in town."

"Scarcely that—scarcely that, young man," interposed Mr. Howard in a tone of friendly authority. "Very possibly, had I expressed a preference, my wishes would have been respected by one or two newspapers where I happen to have some influence. But your statement is altogether too sweeping." He spoke incisively, as though he desired to deprecate the suggestion of the power attributed to him by his more impulsive son. "The

press is jealous of its privileges and must be humored as a popular institution. And, after all, what does a little publicity matter? You mustn't mind what Paul says, Lucille. There's no reason to feel abashed because the public has been given a chance to see the most charming bride of the year."

"Abashed? She is tickled to death," retorted Paul.

Mr. Howard put his arm around his niece's shoulder in the guise of a champion. When controversy had reached the stage where adjustment was no longer possible, he was an uncompromising antagonist. But, as a successful man content with existing conditions, he deplored friction in all the relations of life, and to use an industrial phrase, liked to see everything running smoothly. He laughed incredulously, and patting Lucille's arm exclaimed, "Nonsense!" Then, accosting the clergyman, he added, "Now that this momentous matter has been disposed of, Mr. Prentiss, will you join me in a cigar in my own library?"

Mr. Prentiss excused himself. He had work to do, and knew that if he remained he would be apt to stay late. But he was interested from a theoretic stand-point in the discussion to which he had been listening.

"You evidently feel as I do, Mr. Howard," he said, "that there are two sides to the question of newspaper publicity, and that as good citizens we are not always at liberty to insist on privacy."

Mr. Howard answered with the suave force and clearness which gave to all his utterances the effect of deliberate conviction. "Mr. Prentiss, I

accept the institutions of my country as I find them, and try to make the best of them. There are those whose only pleasure seems to be to carp at what they do not wholly admire in our civic system. The press is one of the most powerful and useful forces of modern life. As such I value and support it, though I'm keenly alive to the flagrant evils and the cruel vulgarities for which it is daily responsible. But one can't afford as an American citizen to condemn as worthless and ill-begotten the things of which the people as a whole approve. We must compromise here as in so many matters in our complex civilization, and where trifles are concerned, be complacent even against our convictions."

"Indisputably," said the clergyman. "In the constant faith that our tolerance will work for improvement."

"Ah, but the newspapers are worse than ever," exclaimed Mrs. Wilson, with a sigh. "One has to wade through so much for so little. I read them scrupulously, because, if I do not, I'm sure to miss something which I would like to see. That sounds inconsistent. But why doesn't somebody establish a really first-class newspaper?"

"Because a newspaper must be first of all a successful business enterprise in order to be able to exist," responded her brother. "It is a question of dollars and cents. All that will come presently. And we are really improving all the time. Just think of what a large and complicated industry a modern newspaper establishment has grown to be." He spoke as though he saw and wished to bring before his hearers' eyes the towering,

mammoth homes of the press in all our large cities, the enforced outcome of the ever-increasing popular demand for the world's news. "Come, Paul," he said, putting his arm through his son's, "since Mr. Prentiss will not join us in a cigar we will leave these good people to their own devices, and go back to our work."

Paul, with a pocket full of documents and with the obnoxious newspaper in his hand, had reached the door of his father's house just as Lucille and her betrothed were alighting from a carriage. Lured by his goading remarks they had followed him within and into his father's library, where at a safe distance he had vouchsafed his cousin glimpses of her tiara-crowned figure and read aloud choice extracts until the spirit had moved him to pass through the dividing door between the two establishments in search of his aunt. He had left home with the idea of an hour's confabulation with his father over certain schemes in which they were jointly interested—a frequent habit of his late in the evening. Mr. Carleton Howard never went to bed before one, and was invariably to be found after eleven in his library reading or cogitating, and always prepared at that quiet time to give his keenest intelligence to the issues presented to him.

Father and son passed along through the secret passageway until they found themselves in Mr. Howard's capacious library. This superb room was the result of an architect's conscientious ambition to see what could be accomplished where his client was obviously willing to obtain excellence and had imposed on him no limits either in re-

spect to space or expense. As regards size, it bore the same relation to the ordinary library of the civilized citizen that the Auditorium in Chicago bears to every-day hotels, or the steamship *Great Eastern* bore to other ocean carriers. Consequently it was a little vast for strict cosiness. The huge stamped leather chairs and sofas, though inviting, seemed designed for persons of elephantine figure, in order perhaps to avoid being dwarfed. But the shelves upon shelves of books which covered completely from floor to ceiling two of the walls—choice editions in fine bindings—gained dignity from the superfluous dimensions. If it be said in this connection that, to one familiar with Mr. Howard's associations, the idea of many storied office buildings might occur, the answer is that he was responsible for nothing which the room contained except its large and admirable display of etchings, which, owing to almost weekly accretions, had begun to disarrange the original æsthetic scheme of the designer. Mr. Howard had left everything else to his architect, but etchings were his hobby—one which had attracted his fancy years before by accident, and had retained its hold upon him. He was familiar now, as a man of sagacity and method, with the many bibliographical and ethnological treasures by which he was surrounded, and could exhibit them becomingly, but when the conversation turned on the etcher's art he was on firm ground and could talk as clearly and authoritatively as about his railroads.

The banker chose his favorite seat, within comfortable distance of one of the fire-places, facing a beautiful polar bear-skin rug of extraordinary

size. Close at hand was a large table with writing materials and such magazine literature or documents as he might wish to examine. Adjustable lights were at either elbow, and in the direct line of his vision as he ordinarily sat were two of his favorite works of art, an Albert Dürer and a Wenceslaus Hollar. He lighted another cigar and, after a few puffs, said:

"That clergyman is decidedly a useful man. He has common sense and he has discretion."

"He isn't at all a bad sort," responded Paul. Though guarded in form, this was intended as an encomium, just as when Paul meant that he had enjoyed himself thoroughly, he was apt to state that he had had a pretty good time. Anglo-Saxon youth is proverbially shy of enthusiasm of the lips lest it be suspected of freshness, as the current phrase is. "I wonder," he added a moment later as he stood with his back to the wood fire, straightening his sturdy shoulders against the mantel-piece, "if he really believes all the things he preaches. I'd just like to know for curiosity. I suppose he has to preach them even if he doesn't or else be fired out, and he compromises with himself for the mental reservation by the argument that if he were out of it altogether, his usefulness and occupation, like Othello's, would be gone. That's the way clergymen must have to argue nowadays, or there wouldn't be many of them left at the old stands."

Though he spoke colloquially, and with an assurance which dispensed with reverence of treatment, Paul intended to express genuine interest and even sympathy. Knowing that his father's ideas

on religious subjects were fundamentally liberal, perhaps he was not averse to shocking him in a mere matter of form. Mr. Howard was silent a moment, then replied:

"In every walk of life it is necessary, from time to time, to sacrifice non-essentials for the sake of the essentials. As in everything else, so in religion. The world moves; opinions change. Human society cannot prosper without religion, and human society never needed its influence more than to-day. Sensible religion, of course."

"All sensible men have the same religion. What is that? A sensible man never tells." Paul was quoting. He had heard his father more than once in his comments on the mysteries of life utter this Delphic observation. He laughed sweetly and fearlessly.

Mr. Howard understood his son. They were good comrades. He was aware that though Paul felt free to jest at his remarks, his boy respected his intellect and would ponder what he said.

"We agree about these things in the main, my dear Paul. If one were to go out on the housetops and proclaim one's scepticism concerning some of the supernatural dogmas which the mass of the people find comfort in, how would it benefit religion? The world will find out soon enough that it has been mistaken. But we can neither of us afford to forget that the security of human society is dependent on religion. One always comes back to that in the end."

"It is good for the masses," said Paul, with a chuckle. "We, as the present lords of creation—captains of industry—should encourage it for the

protection of our railroads, mines, and other glorious monopolies. That is one of the arguments with which the truly great salved their consciences before the French revolution."

Mr. Howard frowned slightly. He knew that Paul was only half in earnest, but the reference to socialism was repellent to him, even though it was rhetorical. Why was he the possessor of twenty millions? Because he had been wiser and more long-sighted than his competitors, because he had used his clear brains to better advantage than other men year after year, planning boldly and executing thoroughly, making few mistakes and taking advantage of every opportunity. Because he had fostered his powers, and controlled his weaknesses. He was rich because, like a true American, he had conquered circumstances and moulded them for his own and the world's profit. Inequalities? Must there not always be inequalities so long as some men were strong and others weak, some courageous and others shiftless? And as for charity, God knew he was willing to do—was trying to do his part to help those who could not or would not help themselves, and to encourage all meritorious undertakings for the relief of human society.

"Yes, we must humor the masses in this as in a thousand matters, and our protection is their protection. I am not disturbed by your insinuation, Paul. Ignorance and sloth and folly and false sentiment would bankrupt mankind in three generations if it were not for the modern captains of industry, as you call them."

Mr. Howard spoke somewhat sternly, as one

stating a proposition which was irrefutable and yet was sometimes overlooked by an ungrateful world. "Similarly," he continued, "it is one thing to be unorthodox in one's opinions and to discard as childish articles of faith to which the multitude adhere, another to deny the reality and force of religion. So, though I am a free thinker, if you will, I regard it as no inconsistency to uphold the hands of the church. On the contrary, every thoughtful man must realize that without religion of some sort the human race would become brutes again."

"And your form is to present fifty or a hundred thousand to a hospital or a college whenever you happen to feel like it, which every clergyman will admit to be practical Christianity. You certainly give away barrels of money, father."

"I can afford to." Mr. Howard was pleasantly but not vain-gloriously aware that he had given away a million dollars in the last three years. "In what better way can I share my profits with the public than by entrusting it to trained educators and philanthropists to spend for the common good? A great improvement, young man, on the theory that every man jack of us should be limited to the same wage, and originality, grit, and enterprise be pushed off the face of the earth."

"Nevertheless it is tolerably pleasant to be your son," said Paul, smiling brightly from his post against the mantel-piece.

"Yes. But you have responsibilities as my son, and pray do not imagine that I am blind to them. I have made the money." He paused a moment, for he was looking back along the vista of

the years and recalling the succession of shrewd undertakings by which his property had grown from a few thousand dollars to imposing wealth. "I have made the money, and it is for you to keep and increase it—yes, increase it, remember—but to spend it freely and wisely. And if you ask me what is wisely, I can only answer that this is a problem for your generation. If you will only use the same pains in trying to solve it as I have in accumulating the money, you will succeed. You are fond, Paul, of exploiting radical propositions, of which you at heart disapprove, in order to test my self-control. Here is something, young man, to chasten your spirit and keep your imagination busy."

"You see through me, father, don't you? But you'll admit that my familiarity with radical doctrines is a good sign, especially since I recognize their fallacies, for it shows that I sometimes think. Yes, it is a great responsibility, but I wouldn't exchange—not even with Gordon Perry."

"With whom? Ah, yes, I remember; the attorney who was on the foot-ball team with you at Harvard. And why should you consider changing places with him?"

"Because the mere question of dollars and cents interests him so little."

"Ah! You have been employing him lately, I believe?"

"Yes. I like to throw what I can in his way. He understands his business. We lunched together this morning. I enjoy his humor, his independence and his common sense, and at the same time his enthusiasm."

"Concerning what?"

"Most things except the price of railroad shares and the condition of the money market. We didn't refer to them once." Paul paused with a serio-comic sigh. Mr. Howard knocked the white ash from his cigar and responded:

"One of the reasons for sending you to college was that you need not be confined in your conversation to the money market. Another that you should be free in life to do as you chose."

"Don't be alarmed, father. You know well enough that nothing would induce me not to follow your lead. Give up business? I couldn't. I love the power and excitement of it. It's bred in the bone, I suppose."

The banker's eyes kindled with pride in the son of his heart.

"And it's because I know I'm myself that a fellow like Don Perry fascinates me," pursued Paul. "There's no nonsense in him. He objects to cranks and mere psalm-singers as much as I do. But he's absorbed in the social problems of the day — legislative questions, philanthropic questions, all the burning questions. 'And your young men shall see visions.' He is one of them. You will notice that I have not forgotten my Bible altogether, father."

"We have, and to burn, reformers who see visions and proclaim them from platforms which have no underpinnings. What we need are reformers who will study and think before they speak, and not seek to destroy the existing structure of society before they have provided a serviceable substitute."

"In other words, you are prepared to part with a portion of your worldly possessions, but you object to wholesale confiscation?" Having indulged in this pleasantry Paul took from the table a packet of papers which he had brought with him, as though to show that he had not forgotten business concerns. "Speaking of the existing structure of society," he continued, "Don and I got into a religious discussion. That is, I found myself holding a brief for the proposition, which I had read somewhere or other, that religion and capital are in alliance against every-day men and women, in order to preserve existing social conditions. Don't look so shocked, father. There are two sides to every question, and I was curious to see how Don would look at this."

"And how did he look at it?" inquired Mr. Howard, coldly, seeing that he was expected to display interest.

"He wouldn't deny that there was some truth in the proposition, but he agreed with you, father, that whatever else is true or false, the world will never be able to dispense with religion. But he says, too, that it must be sensible religion. Just what you said, isn't it? And when two such intelligent individuals come to the same conclusion, it is time for a sceptic like myself to take off his hat to the church. You heard me just now concede that the Rev. Mr. Prentiss is not at all a bad lot."

"Paul, you are sometimes incorrigible. You have common sense when it comes to action, I admit, but you have a perverse fondness for harboring all the philosophical sewage of the age. I

trust that your friend Perry brought you up with a round turn."

"Oh, he did," said Paul, with mock meekness, as he sorted his documents. "We must get to work or else I'd tell you about it. He was very interesting. As to aggregations of capital, Don was highly conservative too. He recognizes that they will last far beyond our time. For a seeker after ultimate truth, I thought that extremely reasonable." Whereupon Paul indulged in a laugh of bubbling, melodious mirth.

Mr. Howard made no comment, but threw the butt of his cigar into the fire-place with the emphasis of one expelling folly by the scruff of the neck, and composed his features for business.

X

CONSTANCE consented to be taught typewriting and stenography at the expense of Mrs. Randolph Wilson. She decided that to refuse an offer which would enable her presently to become self-supporting would be false pride. She acknowledged as sound, under her present circumstances, Mr. Prentiss's assertion that it was no less the duty of the unfortunate to accept bounty within proper limits than of the prosperous to give. She consented also at his instance to call upon her benefactress.

Any encouragement on the part of Constance would have induced Mr. Prentiss to raise a subscription to pay off the second mortgage on the house incurred by Emil, and thus provide her with a home. But at the first hint of such a thing she shook her head decisively. A very different thought was in her mind. Emil was still alive and liable for the bills which he had incurred for the expenses of the canvass, but she felt that the six hundred dollars which he had withheld from his client as an enforced loan must be paid at once or the good name of her children would be tarnished. His appropriation of this money on the eve of his disappearance was damning in its suggestion; but she had thankfully adopted and was clinging tenaciously to the explanation proffered by one of the easy-going and good-natured co-tenants of the office

occupied by her husband, that the money had been borrowed to carry out a speculation, and that Emil had meant to return it. Did not the broker's report of the purchase and sale, found among the papers in Emil's desk, support this? She realized fully that from the mere stand-point of legal responsibility his motive was immaterial. But with her knowledge of his characteristics and of the past she felt that she had the right to insist on the theory that he had been led astray by sanguine anticipations which, as usual, had been disappointed. His conduct had been weak and miserable, and exposed him to obloquy, but it was not the same as deliberate theft. As a mother, she was solicitous to treat the transaction as a loan and to repay it without delay. The world might not discriminate, but for herself and for the children the distinction was essential.

Having been informed how matters stood, and that there was probably still some small value left in the house over and above the two mortgages, she thought she saw an opportunity to discharge this vital obligation. Accordingly, when she found that the clergyman was still considering means for rescuing her home, she disclosed her theory and her purpose.

"My husband borrowed that money, Mr. Prentiss. He expected to be able to return it. I am sure of this. It was just like him. People think it was something worse because of what was in the newspapers. But, guilty as he was, he would not have done that. This being so, I am anxious to have the mortgages foreclosed, or whatever is necessary done, and to have what is left returned

to the woman whose money he borrowed. It was six hundred dollars, and there is the interest. You told me you thought there would be over five hundred left, if the mortgagee was disposed to be reasonable."

Although Mr. Prentiss may have had doubts whether Emil Stuart was entitled to the distinction drawn by his wife, he understood and admired her solicitude. "I see," he said. "I am told that the value of real estate in the neighborhood of your house has improved somewhat, and that you ought to get at least five hundred dollars. But in any event the money which your husband borrowed shall be returned. You need give yourself no further concern as to this; I will see that it is done."

Constance shook her head again. "It wouldn't be the same if anyone else were to pay it," she said, directly.

"So it would not. You are right," he replied with equal promptness, admitting the accuracy of her perception, which had confounded his too glib generosity. "Unless you paid it, you would feel that you had no right to consider that the money had been borrowed."

"Though I am certain of it."

"Precisely—precisely. I understood what you desired, and it was unintelligent of me to bungle." A confession of lack of intelligence by Mr. Prentiss signified not merely deliberate self-mortification, but was offered as a tribute to the mental quality of his visitor. He had chosen a word which would have been wasted on or misinterpreted by the ordinary applicant for counsel, that he

might let her perceive that he was alive to the nicety of her spiritual intuitions. They were at his house—in his comfortable, attractive library—and he understood now that the object of her call had been conscientious eagerness to discharge this debt. There was nothing for him to do but acquiesce in her requirements, and to thank God for this manifestation of grace. This quiet, simple directness, which separated the right from the wrong with unswerving precision, proceeding from the lips and eyes of this pale but interesting woman in faded garb, was fresh and invigorating testimony to the vitality of the human soul exposed to the stress of sordid, workaday realities and unassisted by the choicer blessings of civilization.

Mr. Prentiss pressed her hand with a new warmth as he bade her good-by. "You must come to see me often," he said. "Not for your needs only, but for mine. It helps me to talk with you. And I shall keep my eye on you and see that you get work."

As the upshot of this conversation, Constance surrendered her house to the mortgagee and received six hundred and fifty dollars for her interest in the equity. The small sum remaining after the claim of Emil's client had been satisfied was supplemented presently by the sale of that portion of the furniture unavailable in the tenement into which she moved, so that she had about a hundred dollars saved from the wreck of her former fortunes. The tenement consisted of two sunny rooms in a new apartment house for people of humble means, built by a real estate investor with progressive business instincts from plans suggested

by the Home Beautifying Society of Benham, an aggregation of philanthropic spirits, of which Mrs. Wilson was one of the vice-presidents. Here light, the opportunity for cleanliness, and some modern fixtures, including a fire-escape, were obtainable at a moderate rental; and while the small suites were monotonous from their number and uniformity, their occupants could fitly regard them as a paradise compared with the old-fashioned homes for the poor supervised solely by the dull mercy of unenlightened landlords. Though this was a business enterprise, the owner had felt at liberty even to give some artistic touches to the exterior, and altogther it could be said that the investment represented a model hive of modern workingmen's homes from the point of view of Benham's, and hence American philanthropic commercial aspiration. The structure—Lincoln Chambers, it was called—was on the confines of the poorer section of the city where, owing to the spread of trade, the expansion of the homes of the people was forced further to the south. From two of her windows Constance looked out on vacant lands but half redeemed from the grasp of nature, a prospect littered with the unsightly disorder of a neighborhood in the throes of confiscation by a metropolis; but the mongrel character of the vicinity was to her more than atoned for by the fresh air and the wide expanse of horizon. Her home was on the eighth story—there were ten stories in all—and on the roof there was an arrangement of space for drying clothes which seemed to bring her much closer to the impenetrable blue of the sky. As under the influence of this communion she gave

rein to introspection and fancy, her thoughts harbored for the moment chiefly thankfulness. The stress of her plight had been relieved. Discriminating kindness had enabled her to get a fresh hold on life without loss of her self-respect. What mattered it that her social lot must be obscure, and that she had become one of the undistinguishable many whose identity was lost in this towering combination of small and uniform tenements? She had still a roof over her children's heads and a legitimate prospect of being able to support them without accepting the bitter bread of charity. Yes, she had become one of the humblest of human strugglers, but her abounding interest in these two dear possessions made not only her duty plain but her opportunity inspiring and almost golden. The mortification and anguish of the past she would never be able to forget entirely, but she would make the most of this new chance for world-service and happiness.

It had been necessary to sign some papers in order to convey her interest in the equity of her house, and she went for the purpose to the office of the mortgagee's lawyer. He was a young man, somewhat over thirty, with a noticeably frank face and lucid utterance and kind, intelligent eyes. As he handed her the six hundred and fifty dollars it occurred to her that she would like to employ him to satisfy Emil's obligation. She preferred not to have a personal interview with the creditor lest she be obliged to listen to recriminations against her husband, and she was loth to bother Mr. Prentiss. So she broached the matter, stating briefly that it was a debt which her husband had intended

to pay before his departure. She had already discovered when the papers were signed that the attorney was aware that she had been deserted, and neither did she supply nor did he seek enlightenment beyond the bare explanation offered. Nevertheless, it was obvious to Constance, despite his professional reserve, that he was alive to the import of the transaction for which she was employing him, and that it had inspired in him more than a mere business interest. There was a gentle deference in his manner which seemed to suggest that he knew he was charged with a delicate mission and that he would fulfil it scrupulously. She liked the straightforward simplicity of his address, which was both emphasized and illuminated by the intelligent, amiable glint of his eyes which indicated independence and humor, as well as probity. As she rose to go, Constance realized that she had forgotten his name, and was on the point of opening the receipt for the money which he had given her, in order to ascertain it, when he reached out and taking some cards from one of the pigeon-holes of his desk handed them to her.

"I shall write to you the result of my interview, Mrs. Stuart, and send you a written discharge. Here are a few of my business cards. I hope that none of your neighbors will need the assistance of a lawyer, but if they do, that is my profession, and I intend to do the best I can for my clients."

There was a pleasant earnestness in his tone which saved his speech from the effect of mere solicitation. It seemed to Constance as though he had said not merely that he was eager to get on,

but that he stood ready to help those who like herself had need to bring their small affairs to a sympathetic and upright counsellor. She had asked him previously what his charge would be for securing a release of the claim against Emil. He had hesitated for a moment and she had been apprehensive lest he might say that it would be nothing, but he had replied that it would be three dollars.

She glanced at the cards and read the name—Gordon Perry, Attorney and Counsellor-at-Law, 144 Baker St. Their interview had been in an inner office—a room of moderate size, near the roof of a modern building, with a fine view, eclipsing that of her own flat, and furnished, besides a couple of chairs, with rows of law books and a few large photographs of legal celebrities. On the way out she passed through the general office, where there were more chairs, several of them occupied by visitors who had been waiting for her interview to come to an end, more shelves of books, and two or three desks, at one of which a woman type-writer was sitting at work. The click of the machine sounded melodiously in Constance's ears, and she turned her glance in that direction, in wistful anticipation of the time when she would have similar employment. On her arrival her gaze had been introspective, but now that her errand was over she felt the inclination to observe external things. As she closed the outer door she saw that the glass panel bore a painted inscription similar to that of the card—Gordon Perry, Attorney and Counsellor-at-Law. She reflected that he had been courteous and sympathetic to her, and she felt

sure that he was to be trusted, notwithstanding the rude shock which Emil's prefidy had given to her faith in her own powers of discrimination. There are some dispositions which are turned to gall and forever charged with suspicion by a great shock to love and faith as sweet milk turns to vinegar at the clap of a thunder-storm. There are others whose horizon is cleared by the bitterness of the blow, and who, partly from humility, partly from an instinctive revolt against the doctrine of despair, readjust their perspectives and harbor still the god-like belief that they can know good from evil.

Preliminary to beginning her lessons, Constance had still her call to make on Mrs. Wilson. The new fashionable quarter of Benham, beyond the river Nye, was scarcely more than a name to her, though, especially in the early days of her marriage, she had from time to time included this in her Sabbath saunterings with her husband, and she remembered Emil's having pointed out in terms of irony the twin mansions of Mr. Carleton Howard and his sister in process of erection. She had not felt envious, but when Emil, after inveighing against the extravagance of millionaires, had with characteristic inconsistency, as they stood gazing at the walls of these modern palaces, asserted that he intended some day to have a house of this kind, she had wondered what it would be like, and had contrasted for a moment the lives of the dwellers in this locality with her own, with a sudden appreciation of the power of material circumstances and a wistful curiosity to be translated into an experience which should include white-

aproned maids, drawing-room draperies, and a private equipage as daily accessories. She had silently wondered, too, pondering without abetting her husband's caustic cue, how this contrast was to be reconciled with what she had been taught of American notions of social uniformity and the subordination of the unnecessary vanities and splendor of life to spiritual considerations. It was puzzling, and yet the manifestations of these discrepancies were apparently in good repute and becoming more obvious as the city grew in population and importance.

It is the personal equation in this world which forces truths most clearly upon our attention. So it was that Constance on her way to Mrs. Wilson's was fully alive to the fact—not bitterly, but philosophically and equably—that, despite the theory of democratic social institutions which she had imbibed, actual conditions in Benham were repeating the old-world distinctions between the powerful and the lowly, the rich and the impecunious. There was no blinking the knowledge that she was living obscurely in a flat on the lookout for the bare necessaries of existence, while the woman she was going to see was a woman of wealth and importance, to whom she was beholden for the opportunity of a new start. Obviously, the American experiment had not succeeded in doing away with the distinctions between rich and poor, though patriotic school-books had given her to understand that there were none, or rather that such as existed were spiritual and in favor of people of humble means. Constance could be sardonic if she chose, but like most women she had little taste for irony.

On the other hand, she had a yearning to see things clearly which her misfortunes had only served to intensify.

As she entered Mrs. Wilson's house a new emotion superseded this consciousness of contrast. She had expected to be somewhat edified by the decorations and upholsteries, and had felt a mild curiosity regarding them. But she was wholly unprepared for the superb and spacious surroundings in which she found herself. She walked bewildered through the august hall behind the solemn, fastidious man-servant, who, when she had disclosed her name and errand, ushered her into the reception-room, which served as an ante-chamber to the vista of elegant connecting drawing-rooms. While she waited for Mrs. Wilson she sat gazing with surprise and admiration at the costly and elaborate furnishings and ornaments. It was not that such things were beyond the experience of her imagination at least, for, though she had never been abroad, she felt familiar, through books, with the appearance of splendid houses. She had seen pictures of them, and was not without definite impressions of grandeur. But she had not expected to behold them realized in the social life of Benham. If the discovery was, spiritually speaking, a slight shock, it was a far greater source of delight. Neat as wax herself, but confined both by poverty and early associations to sober hues, she found in the close presence of these bright, seductive, and artistic effects a sort of revelation of the power of beauty which thrilled her deliciously. Here was the culmination of the movement in æsthetic expression of which, as revealed in shop

windows and on women's backs, she had for some time been vaguely aware, but in which she had been forbidden by the rigor of her life to participate. The full meaning of this as an ally to human happiness now burst upon her, and gave her a new joy, though it emphasized the lowliness of her own station.

The aspect and greeting of Mrs. Wilson gave the crowning touch to her pleasure by adding the human complement to the situation. She was facing a smiling, gracious personality whose features, bearing, and gown alike were fascinating and distinguished. Constance felt no inclination to be obsequious. Her native birthright of unconscious ease stood her in good stead. At the same time she desired to appear grateful. She had come to thank the lady of the house, and it was obvious that the lady of the house was a superior individual. What a melodious voice she had, and what a pretty dress! How becoming her crinkly, grizzled hair! What an interesting expression, what a sympathetic light in her eyes! Constance noted these points with womanlike avidity during their interchange of greetings. Mrs. Wilson asked her to sit down.

"I have heard all about you from Mr. Prentiss, Mrs. Stuart," she said, evidently intending by this comprehensive remark to obviate for her visitor the necessity of recurring to a painful past. "He tells me that you have shown great courage. He tells me also that you have left your house and moved into Lincoln Chambers—the new dormitory built under the supervision of our Home Beautifying Society."

"Yes; it is very comfortable. We get a glimpse of the country from our windows."

"I know. That is a conspicuous factor in its favor. Light and fresh air, good plumbing, pure milk, a regular, even though small, supply of ice—these are some of the invaluable aids to health and happiness for all of us, and especially for those upon whom the stress of life falls most heavily. You can command all of these where you are. You have two children, I believe?"

"Yes. A boy of seven and a girl of six."

"They will be a great comfort to you."

"I do not know what I should have done without them."

The pride of maternity encouraged by courtesy drew from Constance this simple avowal of the heart. Though she was not unconscious that Mrs. Wilson's friendliness was imbued with patronage, it was sweet to open her heart for a moment to another woman—and to a woman like this.

"And you have planned to pursue type-writing as an occupation?"

"Yes; I begin my lessons to-morrow, owing to you. I came to thank you for your generosity. It was——"

"I understand. I am very glad that there was something I could do for you. I was interested when Mr. Prentiss spoke to me concerning your necessities and your zeal; I am even more interested now that we have met. I am told by those best informed that there is steady employment for accomplished stenographers. It may be that my own private secretary—a woman who, like yourself, had her own way to make—will be able to

send for you presently. My daughter is to be married before long, and there will be errands to be run and things to be done down-town and in the house, if you would not object to making yourself generally useful."

"I shall be grateful for any employment which you can give me."

"I shall remember." Mrs. Wilson smiled sweetly. She had felt her way decorously, but was pleased to find an absence of false pride in her visitor, who was obviously a gentle woman, though lacking the advantages of wardrobe and social prestige—as she reflected, a sort of Burne-Jones type of severe æstheticism, with a common-sense individuality of her own, and an agreeable voice. "It will be a little discouraging at first, I dare say, until you acquire facility in your work; but I feel certain that in a short time you will be not only self-supporting but happy. A woman with two young children can really live on very little if she is provident and discerning. It is the man who eats. Have you ever studied the comparative nutritive properties of foods?"

Constance shook her head.

"I will send you a little pamphlet in regard to this. Many Americans eat more meat than they require; more Americans are wasteful, and ignorant of food values. Housewives of moderate means who approach this subject in a serious spirit can learn how to nourish adequately the human body at a far less cost than their unenlightened sisters. Cereals, macaroni, milk, bread and butter, cheese—they are all nutritive and easy to prepare. If I may say so, you appear to me just the

woman to appreciate these modern scientific truths, and to make the most of them."

It seemed to Constance that she had never heard anyone speak more alluringly. What was said interested her, and she was pleased by the flattering personal allusion at the close, but every other effect was subordinated for her at the moment to the charm of expression, or, indeed, to Mrs. Wilson's whole magnetic personality as shown in looks and words. She had never before come in personal contact with anything just like it, and it fascinated her. An admiration of this sort would have promptly generated envy and dislike in some women, but in Constance it awoke interest and ambition. Although she felt that she had stayed long enough, she was loth to go, so absorbed was she by the consummate graciousness and sympathetic fluency, by the effective gown and elegant personal details of her hostess. She rose at last, and, impelled to make some acknowledgment of her emotions, said, wistfully, yet in nowise abashed:

"What a beautiful house this is! I have never seen anything like it before. It must be a great pleasure to live here."

The frank artlessness of this tribute was grateful to Mrs. Wilson. "Yes, we think it beautiful. We have tried to make it so. Would you like to walk through some of the other rooms?"

Constance was glad to accept this invitation. As they proceeded Mrs. Wilson let the apartments speak for themselves, adding only an occasional phrase of enlightenment. She was pleased with her visitor, and divined that words were not need-

ful to produce the proper impression. Constance walked as in a trance, admiring unreservedly in thought the splendor, elegance, and diversity of the upholsteries and decoration, admiring also the graceful magnetic woman beside her whose every gesture and intonation seemed attuned to the exquisite surroundings. As they parted Constance said:

"This has been a great pleasure to me." She added, "I had no idea that people here—in this country—had such beautiful homes, such beautiful things."

There was no repugnance in the confession, but a mere statement of fact which suggested satisfaction rather than umbrage at the discovery, although the ethical doubt of the relevancy of these splendors to American ideals was a part of her sub-consciousness. Mrs. Wilson's response gave the finishing touch to this passive doubt. That lady had recognized that she was not dealing with dross but a sensitive human soul, and had refrained from didactic utterances. Yet she felt it her duty, or rather her duty and her mission combined, to take advantage of this opportunity to sow the seed of culture in this rich but unploughed soil by a deft and genuine illustration.

"The spirit which has accomplished what you see here can be introduced into any home, Mrs. Stuart, and work marvels in the cause of beauty, health, and decency," she said with incisive sweetness, her head a little on one side. "Because one is poor it is not necessary to have or foster ugly, inartistic, and sordid surroundings. A little thought, a little reverence for æsthetic truth will

not enable those of restricted means to live in luxury, but it will serve to keep beauty enshrined in the hearts of the humblest household—beauty and her hand-maidens, cleanliness, hygiene, and that subtle sense of the eternal fitness of things which neither neglects to use nor irreligiously mismates God's glorious colors. We as a people have been loth to recognize the value of artistic merit as an element of the highest civilization. Until recently we have been content to cultivate morality at the expense of æsthetic feeling, and have only just begun to realize that that type of virtue which disdains or is indifferent to beauty is like salt without savor. There is no reason why in its way your home—your apartment—should not be as faithful to the spirit of beauty as mine. Do you understand me? Do I make myself clear?" Her mobile face was vibrant with the ardor of proselytism.

Constance looked at her eagerly. "I think I understand," she said. "But," she added, "I might not have understood unless I had seen this house—unless I had seen and talked with you." She paused an instant, for the vision of her own tenement as a thing of beauty, alluring as was the opportunity, had to run the gauntlet of her common sense. Then she asked a practical question. "If one had aptitude and experience, I can see that much might be accomplished. But how is one with neither to be sure of being right?"

Conscious of these honest, thoughtful eyes—eyes, too, in which she felt that she discerned latent charming possibilities—Mrs. Wilson had an inspiration which satisfied herself fully as she thought of it later.

"There is often the great difficulty—also the obstacle to those who labor in that vineyard. But in your case I am sure that you have only to search your own heart in order to find the spirit of beauty. After all, the artistic sense is fundamentally largely a matter of character."

Constance went on her way with winged feet. She felt uplifted by the interview. Her starved senses had been refreshed, and her imagination imbued with a new outlook on life, which though foreign, if not inimical, to some of her past associations, she already perceived to be vital and stimulating.

XI

THREE months later, on a rare day in early June, Miss Lucille Wilson was made Mrs. Clarence Waldo, in the presence of a fashionable company. Journalistic social tittle-tattle had engendered such lively public interest that the neighborhood of St. Stephen's was beset by a throng of sight-seers—chiefly random women—who for two hours previous to the ceremony occupied the adjacent sidewalks and every spot which would command a glimpse of the bride and guests. A force of policemen guarded the church against the incursion of the multitude. Yet perhaps the patient waiters felt rewarded for their pains, inasmuch as the heroine of the occasion, after alighting from her carriage, stood for an instant at the entrance to the canopy before proceeding, as though she were willing to give the world a brief opportunity to behold her loveliness and grandeur. For those with pocket cameras there was time enough for a snap-shot before she was lost to sight.

Within the church were gay silks and nodding bonnet plumes and imposing formalities. Six maids, each wearing as a memento an exquisite locket encrusted with diamonds, and six ushers with scarf-pins of a pearl set in a circle of tiny rubies, escorted the bride to the altar, where the Rev. Mr. Prentiss and two assistant priests were in attend-

ance. When the happy pair had been made man and wife a choir of expensive voices chanted melodiously "O Perfect Love," and the procession streamed down the aisle on its way to the wedding-breakfast. This was served by a New York caterer on little tables with all the gorgeous nicety of which he was capable. Though June is a month when most delicious things are to be had, an effort had evidently been made to procure delicacies which were not in season. The effect of a jam of guests elbowing for their food, as is usual on such occasions, would have lacerated Mrs. Wilson's sensibilities. Her house was large, so she had been able to invite her entire social acquaintance without crowding her rooms, and her instructions had been that there should be numerous deft waiters in order that each guest might come under the benign influence of personal supervision. Accordingly everyone was pleased and in good spirits unless it were the bridegroom, and the doubt in his case was suggested only by the impassiveness of his countenance at a time when it should properly have been the mirror of his heart's joy. Perhaps he had not fully recovered from the farewell dinner given him by his stag friends, as newspaper women are apt to designate a bachelor's intimates, where he had seen fit to express his emotion by drinking champagne to the point when he became musically mellow, a curious and singularly Anglo-Saxon prelude to the holy rite of matrimony. Nevertheless, he was dignified if unemotional; and his frock coat, built for the occasion, his creased trousers, and mouse-colored spats were irreproachable.

When the hour came for the bride and groom to depart there were so many sight-seers about the door that the police had to keep the public at bay in order to afford the happy pair a clear passage to the carriage; and also to give the blithe young men and women ample scope for the discharge of the rice and slippers which convention prescribes shall be hurled at those who set forth on their honeymoon in the blaze of social distinction. For a moment the fun was furious, and, the contagion spreading to the spectators, a cheer partly of sympathy, partly of derision broke forth as the spirited horses, bewildered by the shower of missiles, bounded away toward the station. Two hatless, exhilarated youths chased the retreating victims down the street, one of whom skilfully threw an old shoe so that it remained on the top of the vehicle. When the young couple entered the special Pullman car reserved for them the newsboys were already offering papers containing full accounts of the wedding ceremony, including a list of the guests and of the presents with their donors, large pictures of the bride and groom, and diverse cuts reproductive of the salient features of what one of the scribes designated as the most imposing nuptials in Benham's social history.

And so they were married. And sorry as she was to lose her daughter, Mrs. Wilson was thankful to have it all over, and to be able to settle down once more and unreservedly to the schemes for social regeneration which had shared with maternal affection the energies of her adult mind. To a certain extent these interests had been rivals, unconsciously and involuntarily so, but it has already

been intimated that Lucille was not the kind of girl her mother had intended her to be, and lacked the sympathies which might have made Mrs. Wilson's interests virtually one. To give Lucille all which a modern parent could give and to see her happily married had been her paramount thought. This was now accomplished. The child had received every advantage which wealth could supply, and every stimulus which her own intelligence could suggest. Lucille had not chosen the husband she would have picked out for her. Still Lucille loved him, and since fate had so ordained it, and they had become husband and wife, she was determined to be pleased, and she felt in a measure relieved. The main responsibility was at an end, and she could now enjoy her daughter's married state, and was free to give almost undivided thought to her social responsibilities.

Accordingly on the days which followed the wedding Mrs. Wilson shut herself up in her study, and with the aid of her private secretary proceeded to dispose of her accumulated correspondence, and to put her personal affairs to rights. June was the fag end of the social year. Many of those who had been energetic in social enterprises since the autumn were now a little jaded and on the eve of departure for the country, the Lakes, the Atlantic coast or Europe, in search of that respite from the full pressure of modern life which all who can afford it in our large cities now endeavor to procure for themselves. Nevertheless it was the best time to look the field over and to sow the seeds of new undertakings by broaching them to those whose support she desired by a short note of suggestion

which could be mulled over during the summer. It was not the season to extract definite promises from allies or to enlist new recruits, but essentially that for exploiting ideas which might bear fruit later when the brains and sensibilities of Benham's best element had been rested and refreshed. Mrs. Wilson had numerous charities, clubs in furtherance of knowledge and classes promoting hygienic or æsthetic development to be pondered. For some of these—the struggling annual charities—methods like a fair or theatricals must be devised in order to raise fresh annual funds. The progressive courses of the past winter, such as the practical talks to young mothers, with live babies as object-lessons, and lectures on the relaxation of the muscles, must be superseded by others no less instructive and alluring. Then again new blood must be introduced into the various coteries which worked for the regeneration and enlightenment of the poor to make good the losses caused by matrimony or fickleness, and new schemes originated for retaining the attention of the meritorious persons to be benefited. In this last connection the idea of a course which should emphasize the importance to every woman of learning something on which she could fall back for self-support, suggested by Mrs. Stuart's plight, now recurred to her as timely. And besides these public interests there were the—perhaps more absorbing because more flattering—numerous personal demands on her sympathies and time made by other women—women largely of her own, but of every walk. Here it seemed to her was her most precious vineyard, for here the opportunity was given for soul

to compass soul in an affinity which blessed both the giver and the receiver of spiritual benefits. Sometimes the need which sought her was that of the sinful woman, eager to rehabilitate herself. Sometimes that of the friendless, aspiring student seeking recognition or guidance; but oftener than any that of the blossoming maid or wife of her own class whose yearning nature, reaching out to her's as the flower to the sun and breeze, received the mysterious quickening which is the essence of the higher life, and gave to her in return a love which was like sexual passion in its ardor, but savoring only of the spirit. If she were thus able by the unconscious gifts or grace which were in her to relieve the necessities and attune the aspirations of these choice—and it seemed to her that often the neediest were the choicest—natures, was it strange that she should cherish and even cultivate this involuntary power? Mrs. Wilson's theory in regard to this personal influence was that it was the grateful product of her allegiance to, and passion for, beauty so far as she could lay claim to any merit in the matter. She accepted it as a heaven-sent and heaven-kissing gift which was to be rejoiced in and administered as a trust. Since her talent had turned out to be that of a leader to point the way by virtue of sympathetic intelligence —or, to quote her own mental simile, the electric medium which opened to eager, groping souls the realm of spirit—was not the mission the most congenial which could have been offered her, and in the direct line of her tastes and ambitions? Consequently her private correspondence with those who sought counsel and inspiration in return for

adoring fealty was a labor of care as well as of love. Just the right words must be written, and the individual personal touch imparted to each message of criticism, revelation, homely advice, or mere greeting. To be true to beauty and to maintain her individuality by the free outpouring of herself from day to day in felicitous speech of tongue and pen was her glowing task. In the pursuance of it she had acquired mannerisms which were now a part of herself. Her phrases of endearment, her chirography, her note-paper, her method of signing herself, had severally a distinction or peculiarity of their own. All this was now a second nature; but at the outset she had been conscious of it, and, though never challenged, she had once written in vindication in one of her heart-to-heart missives that the mysterious forces of the universe through which God talks with man wear not the garb of conforming plainness, but have each its special exquisiteness; witness the moon-bathed summer night, the mountain peak at sunrise, the lightening glare among the forest pines, the lordly ocean in its many moods. She had a memory for birthdays and anniversaries. In the hour of bereavement her unique words of consolation were the first to arrive. She was prodigal of flowers, and her proselytes, knowing her affection for the rose and the lily, were apt to transform her study into a bower on the slightest excuse. She never wrote without flowers within her range of vision.

In the evening of one of these days following her daughter's wedding, Mrs. Wilson was interrupted in her correspondence by the entrance of her maid with the bewildering news that a baby

had been left on the doorsteps, and that a woman, presumably its mother, had, in the act of stealing away after ringing the bell, run into the arms of one of the servants, and was now a prisoner below stairs. The maid was agitated. Should they send for a policeman, or what was to be done? The course to adopt had not been clear to those in authority in the kitchen, and the solution had been left to the mistress whose eleemosynary tendencies had to be taken into account.

An infant, a waif of destiny, left on her doorsteps at dead of night! There was only one thing to do, to see the baby, and to talk to the mother, and for this purpose Mrs. Wilson had both brought before her in the ante-room where she had received Constance Stuart. Rumor flies fast, and by this time a burly, belted policeman had arrived on the scene and stood towering in the background behind the quartette of servants, the butler, the second-man, who had apprehended the woman, a housemaid who had taken the custody of the child, and Mrs. Wilson's own maid. Mrs. Wilson surveyed the group for an instant with the air of a photographer in search of a correct setting. Then, with a smile of divination, she said, authoritatively, "Now, Mary, give the child to its mother, and when I need anyone, I will ring. You, too, Mr. Officer, please wait outside. I am sure that this woman will tell me her story more freely if we are alone. And, James, bring some tea—the regular tea-service."

As the servants took their departure, Mrs. Wilson looked again at the woman, whom she had already perceived to be young and good looking.

She stood holding her baby securely but not tenderly, with a half-defiant, half-bewildered air, as of a cat at bay in strange surroundings. But though her mien expressed a feline dismay, Mrs. Wilson perceived that she was no desperate creature of the slums. Nor was she flauntily dressed like the courtesan of tradition. Her attire—a neat straw sailor hat, a well-fitting dark blue serge skirt and serge jacket over a white shirt, and decent boots indicated some social aptness; and her features, especially her clever and sensitive, though somewhat hard, mouth gave the challenge of intelligence. It was a smart face, one which suggested quick-wittedness and the habit of self-reliance, if not self-satisfaction, to the detriment of sentiment and delicacy. She appeared to Mrs. Wilson to be about twenty-three, and slightly shorter than Mrs. Stuart, with a sturdier, less flexible figure. Her hair was light brown, and her complexion fair, but she had roving dark eyes which gave a touch of picturesqueness to what might be called the matter-of-fact modernness of her aspect. They were curious eyes, almost Italian in their hue and calibre, yet in repose coldly scrutinizing and impassive. Mrs. Wilson appreciated with a sense of relief that here was no case of sodden ignorance and degradation; for though in such instances the remedy was more obvious, she preferred to be brought in contact with natures which drew upon her intellectual faculties. She believed herself modern in her sympathies, and in her capacity as a philanthropic worker was partial to the problems with which modern conditions

"I am sure that this woman will tell me her story"

and modern thought confront struggling human nature.

"Won't you sit down? And perhaps you would like to lay your baby on the sofa while we talk and I make you some tea."

The girl, who was prepared probably for a sterner method, yielded, after a quiver of uncertainty, to the fascination of this gracious appeal; pausing for a brief instant to examine the tiny face peering from the folds of the knit shawl in which the child was wrapped, but with a gaze scientific rather than maternal, as though she were seeking to trace a likeness or some law of heredity. Then she sat down and raised her eyes to meet her entertainer's with a glance bordering on irony, and which seemed to ask, "Well, what are you going to do about it?" Mrs. Wilson noticed that her hands, which lay in her lap, lightly crossed, with the palms down, were long and efficient-looking, and that she wore no wedding-ring.

"Is it a boy or a girl?" Mrs. Wilson resumed, with disarming gentleness.

"A girl." With a contraction of her mouth which began in a bitter smile and ended against her will in a gulp, she added, "I didn't intend to have it. I didn't want to have it. I suppose you've guessed I'm not a married woman."

"Yes, I guessed that. I see, too, that you are in trouble, and my sole object in detaining you here to-night is to give you all the aid in my power. I'm not seeking to judge or to lecture you, but to help you."

The girl regarded her with a matter-of-fact

stare, then said, bluntly, "I'd have been all right now if your servant hadn't nabbed me."

"You mean if you had succeeded in abandoning your child?"

"Yes. I was earning my living before, and I could go on. I guess I could have got back my old place."

"But— Do you mind telling me why you wished to abandon your baby?"

"That's why. I've just told you. To make a fresh start."

"I see. And it was chance, I suppose, that you left it on my door-steps rather than elsewhere?"

"You're Mrs. Randolph Wilson, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"I had read about you in the newspapers, and all about the wedding, and that you were tremendously rich. When my child was born I hoped she'd die; but, as she didn't, I made up my mind that the best thing I could do was to let you look after her. But the luck was against me a second time. I was caught again." She laughed as though her only concern was to let fate perceive that she had some sense of humor.

Mrs. Wilson frowned involuntarily. Yet, though her taste was offended her curiosity was whetted.

"But wasn't your—wasn't he man enough to look after you and provide for the child?"

"I didn't tell him. He doesn't know. It wasn't his fault. That is"—she paused for a moment, but her expression suggested solicitude lest the naked truth should be disconcerting rather than shame—"I took the chance. Neither of us in-

tended to be married. He travels mostly, and is here only two or three times a year. What would he do with a baby anyway?"

The entrance of the butler with the tea things was opportune. It gave Mrs. Wilson time to think. Her experience of women of this class had been considerable. If not invariably penitent, they had always shown shame or humble-mindedness. Here was a new specimen, degenerate and appalling, but interesting to the imagination.

While the servant set the glittering, dainty silver service on the table at his mistress's side the girl watched her and him with obvious curiosity and a mixture of disdain and fascination. Now and again her roving eyes took in the exquisite surroundings, then reverted to the face of her would-be benefactress as to a magnet. It seemed to be the triumph of a desire not to appear worse than she really was which made her speak when they were alone, and Mrs. Wilson, still in search of inspiration, was busy with the tea-caddy.

"I wasn't going to let her out of my sight until I knew she was safe." She nervously compressed the back of one of her hands with the long fingers of the other in the apparent effort to justify her course, a consideration to which she was evidently not accustomed. "Wouldn't she have had a better home at the expense of the State than any I could have given her? And there was the chance you might take a fancy to her and adopt her. She's less homely than the average new-born young one. You see I thought everything over, lady. And next to its dying that seemed to me the best chance it had for happiness in a best possible world."

"Ah, but you mustn't talk like that. It's hard, I know, egregiously hard. But you mustn't be bitter," said Mrs. Wilson, with mandatory kindness.

The girl smiled in a superior fashion; it was almost a sneer. Her desire to justify herself had been an involuntary expression. Now vanity intervened, vanity and the pride of smouldering opinion. "I'm not bitter; I'm only telling you the plain truth. I'm ignorant, I dare say, compared to you; but I'm not so ignorant as you think. I've thought for myself some; and—and all I say is that this isn't any too good a world for a girl like me anyway, and when a girl like me goes wrong, as you call it, and has a kid, instead of crying her eyes out the sensible thing for her to do is to find someone to look after it for her."

"Which only proves, my child, that such a thing ought never to happen to her."

"No—not if she has luck."

There was a brief pause; then with an impulsive glide Mrs. Wilson swept across the room and transferred a cup of tea to the hands of this wanderer from the fold of grace and ethics. The girl, taken off her guard, tried to rise to receive it, and looked at her with the half-fascinated expression of a bird struggling against the fowler. Sitting down beside her, Mrs. Wilson took one of her hands and said, "Do you not understand, my dear, that society must insist for its own preservation that a woman shouldn't go wrong? The whole safety of the family is based on that. That's the reason the world has to seem a little cruel to those of our sex who sin against purity. Children must

know who their fathers are." She had these precepts in their modern guise at the tip of her tongue; she hastened to add, benignly, "But though the world in self-defence turns a cold shoulder on the unchaste woman, for her who seeks forgiveness and a fresh start there are helping hands and loving words which offer forbearance and counsel and friendship."

"But supposing I'm not seeking forgiveness? That's the trouble, lady. If only now I were a shame-faced, contrite sinner down in the dust at the foot of the cross asking permission to lead a new life, how much simpler it would be for both of us!"

Mrs. Wilson gasped. The coolness of the sacrilege disturbed her intellectual poise. The girl might have been speaking of an invitation to dinner instead of the redemption of her soul so casual was her regret. "That is where you belong; that is where you must come in order to find grace and peace," she said, in an intense whisper.

"I've shocked you."

"Yes, you've shocked me. But that doesn't matter. You don't realize what you're saying. The important thing is to save you from yourself, to cleanse the windows of your soul so that the blessed light of truth may enter."

The girl regarded her curiously, nervously abashed at the impetuous kindness of this proselytism. "That's what I meant by saying I'd thought some. If it's church doctrine you mean, you'd only be disappointed. It may help people like you. But for the working people—well, some of us who use our wits don't think much of it."

Though Mrs. Wilson looked profoundly grieved, the spiritual melancholy emanating from her willowy figure and mobile countenance was charged with resolution as well as pity.

"It isn't merely church doctrine that you lack. You lack the spirit of Christian civilization. Your entire point of view is distorted. You are blind, child, utterly blind to the eternal verities."

The girl's dark eyes grew luminous in response to this indictment, but a deprecating smile trembled on her lip in protest at her own susceptibility.

"What is it you want me to do?" she said at last.

"To begin with, I wish you to support your child as a woman should. You brought it into the world, and you owe to the helpless little thing a mother's love and care. Will you tell me your name?"

"Loretta Davis."

"And what has been your employment?"

"They don't know. I don't want them to know. I gave them as an excuse that I was tired of the place."

"I'm not asking your employer's name. What kind of work was it?"

"I was assistant cashier in a drug store."

"And before that?"

"I answered the bell for a doctor."

"I see. I don't wish to pry into your affairs; but do you belong here? Are your parents living?"

"I don't mind telling. There's not much to tell. My father and mother are dead. I was born about a hundred miles from here and attended the public school. I had my living to make,

so I came to Benham about two years ago. I had acquaintances, and was crazy to go into a store. But a girl who came from the same town as I was going to be married, and got me her place to look after the doctor's bell and tidy up. He was a dentist. He lost his health and had to go to Colorado for his lungs, and then I went to the drug store. That's all there is to tell, lady—that is, except one thing, which doesn't count much now."

"You might as well tell me that also."

"Oh, well, I'd been thinking of training to be a nurse when I got into trouble. I'd got used to doctors and medicine, and they told me I had the sort of hands for it." She exhibited her strong, flexible fingers. "If I had got rid of my baby, I was going to apply to a hospital. So you see I've got some ambition, lady. I wanted to be of some use. I'm not altogether bad."

"No, no, I'm sure you're not. I understand perfectly. And the baby shan't stand in the way of your making the most of yourself. I will arrange all that." Mrs. Wilson spoke with fluent enthusiasm. She felt that she had discovered the secret of, if not the excuse for, the girl's callousness. Unwelcome maternity had interrupted the free play of her individuality at the moment when she was formulating a career, and as a modern woman herself, Mrs. Wilson understood the bitterness of the disappointment. It gave her a cue to Loretta's perversion, so that she no longer felt out of touch with her. She refrained from the obvious temptation of pointing out that a nurse's best usefulness would be to guard her tender child, and broached instead the project which swiftly

suggested itself the moment she felt that she had fathomed the cause of the culprit's waywardness.

"I know just the home for you; a little tenement in the Lincoln Chambers. The rooms are savory, convenient, and attractive, and on the opposite side of your entry lives an earnest, interesting spirit, a woman whose husband has deserted her, left her with two children to provide for. She will be glad to befriend you, and you will like her. I happen to know that the tenement is vacant, and it is the very place for you."

Loretta had listened with sphinx-like attention. When Mrs. Wilson paused her eyes began to make another tour of her surroundings, and at the close of her remark ignored the theme of conversation.

"I never was inside a multi-millionaire's house before. That's what you are, ain't it?"

The query was queer, but not to be evaded. "I'm a rich woman certainly, which makes it all the easier for me to help you." If this savored of a pauperizing line, which was contrary to Mrs. Wilson's philanthropic principles, she felt that she must not at all hazards let the girl slip through her fingers.

"If I'm willing that you should."

"Of course. But you are, I'm sure you are. You're going to trust me and to put yourself into my hands."

The confidence and charm of this fervor suddenly met with their reward. Loretta had held back from genuine scruples, such as they were. Instinctive independence and a preconceived distrust of fine ladies had kept her muscles stiff and

her face set, though she felt thrilled by a strange and delicious music. No one could have guessed that it was only the habit of awkwardness which restrained her from falling on her knees in an ecstasy of self-abasement, not from an access of shame, but as a tribute to the woman whose personality had captivated her against her will.

"You seem to take a heap of interest in me, don't you?" The words by themselves suggested chiefly surprise, but the sign of her surrender showed itself in her eyes. They were lit suddenly with an intensity which overspread her countenance, bathing its matter-of-fact smartness in the soft light of emotion. "I'm willing to do whatever you like," she said.

XII

IF it be said of Gordon Perry, attorney and counsellor-at-law, that he was loth to incur the modern epithet, "crank," it was equally true that he had ideals and cherished them. He believed in living up to his convictions. At the same time his sense of humor made him aware that to dwell unduly on premeditated virtue is the prerogative of a prig, and that it is often wise in a workaday world to yield an inch if one would gain an ell. His form of yielding was apt to be genial, thoughtful consideration of the other man's point of view, a virtual admission that there were two sides to the case, instead of flying in the face of his opponent. The modern American regards this tactful moderation as essential to the despatch of business, and prides himself on its possession. It is the oil of the social industrial machine. Also it is slippery stuff. One is liable to slide yards away from one's point of view unless one plants one's feet firmly. It is so much easier to follow the trend than to resist it. The natural tendency of those not very much in earnest is to woo success by dancing attendance on the powers which are, both movements and men. So convictions become palsied, and their owners mere puppets in the whirl of human activity. For the sake of fortune, fame, or oftenest for the sake of our bread and butter, we subscribe to theories and

support standards which we suspect at heart to be unsound, lest we fail to keep step with the class to which we belong.

How to preserve his poise as an independent character and at the same time avoid antagonism with some of his new friends had become interesting to Gordon Perry. He had reached a point where he had only to be quiescent in order to reap presently a rich harvest. His clear-headedness, his quickness, and his common sense had been recognized, and it was in the air that he was a rising man in his profession. People of importance had taken him up. It was known that he had attended to certain matters for Paul Howard, from whom it was only one step to the source of many gigantic undertakings productive of fat fees. To the eye of shrewd observers in Benham he had only to go on as he had been going, and attend strictly to business, in order to emerge from the ranks of his brother lawyers, and become one of the small group which controlled the cream of the legal business of the city. Instead of bringing accident cases he would defend them for powerful corporations. Instead of conducting many small proceedings at an expense of vitality for which his clients could not afford and did not expect to pay adequately, he would be employed by banks and trust companies, would organize and reorganize railroads, be made the executor of large estates and the legal adviser of capitalists in financial schemes from which profits would accrue to him in the tens of thousands. It ought to be comparatively plain sailing. This was obvious to the man in question as well as to his contemporaries.

He knew that his business was growing, and sundry rumors had reached him that he had been spoken of in inner circles as skilful and level-headed.

To indicate the current which ran counter in Gordon Perry's thoughts to his appreciation of these possibilities it will be necessary to refer briefly to his past and to his mental perspective. He was the son of a widow. Also a soldier's son. His father, a volunteer, had survived the Civil War, and, attracted by the rising destinies of Benham, had made his home there, only to fall victim to a fever within a year of his coming. Gordon was then eleven years old. A policy of life insurance kept the wolf from the door for the afflicted widow so far as a bare subsistence was concerned. She had a small roof over her head, and was able by means of boarders and needlework to present a decent front to the world while she watched over her sole treasure, her only child. Her ambition was to give him an education, and her ambition in this respect was neither niggardly nor ignorant. He was to have the best—a college training—and to give him this it delighted her to pinch and to slave. When a woman's duty is squarely determined by responsibility for a fatherless son, it is comparatively easy for her to be true to her trust to the extent of complete devotion and unselfishness. But devotion and unselfishness do not include wisdom. Happy for him whose mother is a victim neither to superstition nor to silliness, but sees life with a clear, sane outlook. Mrs. Perry was one of those American women educated in the days of Emersonian

spirituality, when society walked in the lightest marching order as regards material comforts and embellishments, who were austere and sometimes narrow in their judgments, but who set before them as the one purpose of life the development of character. She was simple, pious, brisk, and direct; setting great store on acting and speaking to the point, and abhorring compromise or evasions. In her religious faith she believed, as a Unitarian, about what liberal Episcopalians and Presbyterians believe to-day. Doctrine, however, appeared to her of minor importance compared to the pursuit of noble aims and the practice of self-control. She wished her son to care for the highest things, those of the spirit and the intellect, because she regarded them with sincerity as the passports to human progress; and, though her æsthetic aims were dwarfed, and human color and grandeur may have seemed to her to smack of degeneracy, the white light of her aspirations had a convincing beauty of its own.

Under the influence of this training and this point of view, Gordon went to Harvard. There he encountered a new atmosphere. The old gods were not dead, but they seemed moribund, for there were others. The college motto, "Veritas," still spoke the watchword of faith, yet the language of his class-mates led him to perceive that what was the truth was again in controversy. The Civil War was over, but the martial spirit which had sprung into being at the call of duty and love of country was seething in the veins of a new generation eager to rival in activity the heroism of its fathers. It was no longer enough to walk in

contemplation beneath the college elms and develop character by introspective struggle. Truth —the whole truth, lay not there. Was not useful, skilful action in the world of affairs the true test of human efficiency? A great continent lay open to ingenious youth trained to unearth and master its secrets. How was it to be conquered unless the spirit of energy was nourished by robust frames, unless men were practical and competent as well as soulful?

Gordon listened to this new note with a receptive ear, and recognized its value. Hitherto he had thought little of his body, which, like an excellent machine, had performed its work without calling itself to his attention. Now he took part in college athletics, and realized the exhilaration which proceeds from healthful competitive exercise. Through contact with his mates, and active participation in the affairs of the college world, he experienced also the still more satisfactory glow, best described as the joy of life, which, partly physical, partly athletic, had never been a portion of his consciousness. He was drafted for the football team, and by his prowess and his pleasant, manly style acquired popularity in the college societies, that fillip to self-reliance and proper self-appreciation. If, as a consequence, he relaxed somewhat his efforts to lead his class in scholarship, which had been his sole ambition at the start, he did not forget that he was a pensioner on his mother's self-sacrifice; and though his rank at graduation was not in the first half-dozen, it was in the first twenty-five, and it could be said of him that he looked fit for the struggle of life, the pos-

sessor of a healthy mind in a well-developed body. He was sophisticated, but his soul was untarnished by dissipation, and the edge of his enthusiasm for enterprise and endeavor was not dulled. Then followed three years at the law school, where in common with nearly everyone he worked like a beaver to equip himself for his profession. There all interests—it might be said all emotions—were absorbed in contemplation of technical training. But he was still under the shadow of the Harvard elms, and the great world lay beyond, a land of mysterious promise to his eager vision.

However clear-sighted and philosophical a college graduate, his first actual contact with the great world is apt to be depressing. Society seems so large and so indifferent; he is so insignificant and so helpless—he who six months ago was a hero in the eyes of his companions. Especially is this apt to be the case when one is translated from the dizzy democratic heights of college renown to a humble, humdrum social station. It was no revelation to Gordon Perry to find himself the son of a hard-working, inconspicuous boarding-house keeper, but it sobered him. He was neither ashamed of the fact nor dismayed by it. On the contrary, the sight of his mother's tired face and figure subordinated every ambition to his loving determination to conquer the world for her sake. It seemed, however, a less simple matter to conquer the world now that he was an unknown student in a law office in a large city, with no family influence or powerful friends to abet his endeavors. For the first few years his lot was so obscure that the contrasts of life arrested his attention as they

had never done before, though as a subconsciousness, for he never outwardly paused in his efforts to become indispensable to the firm of lawyers in whose office he was. He beheld acquaintances in various employments, whose mental superior he believed himself to be, put in the direct line of preferment through pecuniary or social influence, and had to solace himself with the doctrine—also the American doctrine—that it was every man's privilege to make the most of his own advantages, and his duty to acknowledge the same privilege in others.

Some young men are made cynical by the perception of the workings of free competition; others simply thoughtful. Gordon was among the latter. Life presented itself to him from a new perspective, and if it suddenly appeared both perplexing and distressing, it appeared none the less interesting. His personal dismay, if this passing reaction deserves so harsh a term, was transient, but it was the precursor to graver, disinterested musings. His attention once arrested by the inequalities of life turned further afield and became riveted by concern and by pity. Why in this city, established under free institutions, was it necessary that thousands should be living in poverty, ignorance, and social ineffectiveness if not degradation? It ought not to be. It must not be. How could it be averted? This outburst of his protesting spirit encountered the query of his dispassionate mind—what remedy do you suggest? It was like a douche of cold water. Instinctively he reached out for help. He knew that he was in search of truth this time, but he abhorred an *ignis*

fatuus. He began to ask questions and to read. There were various answers on the lips of those whom he consulted, for the question seemed to be in the air. Many, and there were among them some whose broad shoulders, free carriage, and prosperously self-reliant air told of that joy in living and practical, world-conquering serenity typical of the successful man of the present generation, who assured him, often in a whisper, as though it were a confidence, that these inequalities must always exist. Were not men's abilities different, and would they not always be so? Was it just that one man's energy and skill should be curtailed to keep pace with another's incapacity? What would become of human individuality and brilliancy if everyone's earning and owning were to be circumscribed by metes and bounds, and we were all to become commonplace, unimaginative slaves of socialism? It was right, of course, that existing abuses in the way of long hours and insufficient pay should be rectified. That was on the cards. In many cases it had been already consummated. And what had malcontents or critics of the existing industrial system to say to the long list of splendid benefactions—free libraries, free hospitals, free parks, and free museums—given to the community by rich men—men who had been abler and more progressive than their fellows? Surely the world would be a dull place without competition.

There were others who declared that the destruction of the poor was their poverty, and that the poor man was at fault. That if he would let liquor alone, have fewer children, and brush his

teeth regularly, he would be happy and prosperous. They called Gordon's attention to the many schemes for the uplifting of the industrial masses which were already in operation in Benham, homes for abandoned children, evening classes where instruction and diversion were skilfully blended, model tenements, and, most modern of all, college settlements, the voluntary transplanting of individual educated lives into social Saharas.

The books which he read were of two classes. Their writers were either optimistic apologists for the current ills of civilization, deploring and deprecating their existence, and suggesting the gradual elimination of social distress by education and intelligent humanity—"the giving of self unreservedly," as many put it—without serious modification of the structure of society; or they were outspoken enemies of the present industrial status, alleging that poverty and degradation were an inseparable incident of unchecked human competition, and that these evils would never be eradicated until the axe was applied to the fundamental cause. These latter critics had diverse preliminary crucial remedies at heart, such as the capitalization of land, government control of railroads, mines, and other sources of power, or the appropriation to the use of the community of a slice of abnormal profits.

Most of this presentation, whether through men or from books, was not new to Gordon; but it had been hitherto unheeded by him and had the full effect of novelty. He found himself staring at a condition of affairs which he had patriotically if carelessly supposed could not exist in the land

of the free and the home of the brave until he suddenly opened his eyes and beheld in full operation in his native city, of which he was becomingly proud, those grave contrasts of station common to older civiliations. These included on the one hand not only the uneducated army of workers in Benham's pork factories, oil-yards, and iron mills, but an impecunious, shiftless lower class; and on the other what was, relatively speaking, a corporal's guard of wealthy, wideawake, luxurious, ambitious masters of the situation, to whom he hoped presently to commend himself as a legal adviser.

But what was the remedy? What was his remedy? In the coolness of second thoughts, after months of ferment, he had to confess that he had none—at least none at the moment. Simultaneously he had reached the further conclusion, which was both a relief and a distress, that whatever could be done must be gradual, so gradual as to be almost imperceptible when measured by the span of a single life. He recalled, with a new appreciation of the truth, the saying that the mills of God grind slowly. From the vanguard hope of a complete change in current conditions, by a series of telling blows of his own conception, he was forced back to a modest stand behind the breast-works. Modest because he began to examine with a new respect the philanthropic and economic apparatus for attack already in position, which he had at first glance been disposed to regard as too cumbersome and dilatory. Here was where his purpose not to be quixotic and visionary came to his support. He realized that it was necessary for him to wait and to study before he could

hope to be of service; that he must take his position in the ranks and observe the tactics of others before attempting to assume leadership or to initiate reforms.

One effect of this check to his soaring aspirations at the dictate of his common sense was to give a fresh impetus to his resolve to succeed in his profession. For a brief period the shock of his discoveries had been so stunning that he almost felt as though it were his duty and his mission to devote his life to finding a remedy for the ills of civilization. His mother's necessities stood as a bar to this. But with the ebbing of his vision he found himself no longer beset with doubts as to the legitimacy of his apprenticeship. It seemed to him clearly his duty, not only on his mother's account but his own, to throw himself into his work unreservedly with the intention of hitting the mark. He had his bread to earn, his way to make. How would it profit him or anyone that he should forsake his calling and stand musing by the wayside merely because he was distressed by the inequalities of the industrial system? Inequalities which existed all over the world and were as old as human nature. He had no comprehensive cure to suggest, so for the time being his lips were sealed and his hands tied by his own ignorance. And if conscience, borrowing from some of the books which he had read, argued that the prosperous lawyer was the agent of the rich against the poor, the strong against the weak, his answer was that the taunt was not true, and his retort by way of a counter-sally was that in no country in the world did the laboring man receive so high wages

as in this. This at least was a step forward, and so he felt justified to follow precedent and to bide his time.

In order to succeed a young lawyer must be ceaselessly vigilant. It is not enough to perform faithfully what he is told. There are many who will do this. The man who gets ahead is he who does more than the letter of his employment demands, who anticipates instructions and disregards time and comfort in order to follow a clue of evidence or elucidate a principle. So he becomes indispensable, and by and by the opportunity presents itself which the shiftless ascribe to luck. Gordon Perry revealed this faculty of indefatigable initiative. The firm in whose office he was a student had a large business, chiefly in the line of commercial law. The transit of the various commodities to which Benham owed her prosperity was necessarily productive of considerable litigation against the railroads as common carriers and between the shippers and consignees of wares and merchandise. Besides, there were constant suits for personal injuries to be prosecuted or defended, involving nice distinctions as to what is negligence, and bringing in their train much practice for the juniors in the investigation of testimony. From the outset Gordon worked with unsparing enthusiasm, seeking to do the work entrusted to him so thoroughly that those who tried the cases would find the situation clearly defined and everything at their fingers' ends. When it was perceived that he was not only diligent but discerning and accurate, they began to rely on him, and by the end of three years the responsibility of trying as well as of pre-

paring the less important proceedings in the lower courts became his. Also, by showing himself solicitous regarding the affairs of the clients of the office, he was able now and again to supply information or tide matters over when the member of the firm inquired for was out; and it was not long before some of them formed the habit of consulting him directly in minor matters. When at the end of five years the senior partner, who had independent means, retired in order to go to Congress, his two associates came to the conclusion that it would be good policy, as well as just, to give Perry, as the most promising young man in the office, a small interest in the business. This promotion naturally gave him a new status with the clients, and most of those who had been in the habit of consulting him offhand, now laid their serious troubles before him. So by the time he was twenty-nine he was well started in his profession, and able to extract a promise from his mother that if he continued to prosper for another year, she would yield to his solicitations to give up her boarders and move into a brighter neighborhood.

Although absorbed in his profession, Gordon's genial charm soon brought him invitations of a social nature. He became a member of a law club of men of his own age, which met once a month to compare impressions and banish dull care over a good dinner. Still eager for exercise he joined a rowing club on the river Nye, and a gymnasium. After he was admitted to the firm he had his name put up for election at one of the social clubs, The University, so called because its members were college graduates. Here he met the educated

young men of the city, and though his mother had an old-fashioned prejudice against clubs, as aristocratic resorts where men gambled and drank more than was good for them, Gordon felt that he needed some place where he could play a game of whist or billiards with congenial spirits or look at magazines in a cosey library as an antidote to his sterner pursuits. Mrs. Perry was more than willing to trust her son, so she sighed and set down to the changed temper of the day the spread of Benham's club fever. For, like other progressive cities, Benham was fairly honeycombed with clubs. The American social instinct had become almost daft on the subject, and no two or three men or women could come together for any purpost without organizing. From a constitution and by-laws the road was apt to be short to rooms or a clubhouse. The University was one of half a dozen of the purely social clubs of the city, a spacious establishment, modelled on European traditions with American plumbing and other modern comforts. Gordon was prompted to join by Paul Howard, who declared that he preferred it for genuine enjoyment to the Eagle Club, the favorite resort of the very rich and fashionable—the Spread Eagle, as the malicious termed it. At The University there was secular instrumental music on Sunday afternoons, a custom copied from Boston, that former hotbed of ascetic Sabbath life, and on Saturday nights a cold supper was provided, about which stood in pleasant groups the active professional and business men of the city and those who followed the arts—musicians, painters, and literary men.

"Exclusive and aristocratic all the samee," said Hall Collins, contemptuously, one day when Gordon vouchsafed to him a glowing account of these Saturday nights. Hall was one of the moving spirits in the only other club of which Gordon was a member, The Citizens' Club, the somewhat ambitious title of an organization conducted by young men interested in civic and industrial reform, not unlike that to which the unhappy Emil Stuart had belonged.

"Which only shows how little you understand what we are after," was the prompt answer. "There isn't a more truly democratic place in the world—only we insist that a man should win his spurs before he is entitled to consideration. A clod, while he is a clod, isn't a gentleman, and it isn't good American doctrine to regard him as one. No logic will make him so. You're talking through your hat, Hall, and you know it."

Hall grinned. It was true he was not more than half in earnest, but he was more than half suspicious of Gordon. He could not make him out, which nettled him, for Hall Collins liked to have men docketed in his mind.

"To Gehenna with your gentlemen!" he retorted. "What use are spurs to a man who has no boots to wear them on?"

"Hear, hear!" interjected two or three bystanders whose attention was caught by the metaphor.

"It strikes me, young man," pursued Collins, who had his chair tipped back, his feet on the table and was smoking a fat cigar which one of

the aldermen had given him, appropriated by the wholesale at a city banquet, "that you're trying to ride two horses." He was glad to have an audience to the discussion, for he could not make up his mind that Gordon was sincere in his interest in the Citizens' Club, and he feared some ulterior motive, political or quasi-philanthropic.

"Yes, that's just what I'm doing," answered Gordon. "Half of the lack of sympathy between the educated and the uneducated, between capital and labor, as you like to call it, lies in the imagination. What is there incompatible in being a member of a club like this and wearing patent-leather shoes and the latest thing in collars?"

"It smacks too much of college settlements. It doesn't go to the root of things."

"But it helps just as they help, unless in the ideal democracy you are aiming at there's to be no place for the refinements of life, for soft speech, gentle manners, and the arts. In the millennium are we all to be uncouth and unimaginative?"

"Score one for the man with the patent-leather shoes, only he hasn't got them on," exclaimed one of the listeners.

"You're beginning at the wrong end. You put the cart before the horse; that's the trouble with you. What's the use of decorating a house that's going to be struck by lightning?" With all his prejudice and homely exterior Hall Collins was at heart no demagogue or charlatan. He was dead in earnest himself and he wished others to be. He

was conversant with the history of the development of trades-unions over the world. He was a student of humanitarian reforms, and gave all the time which he could spare from his occupation as a master-mason to the furtherance of what he considered legislative progress.

"Struck by lightning, and then there's no house, only ruins. That's not what you desire, Hall Collins, you, I, nor anyone here. We're all seeking the same thing, and we're all groping more or less in the dark—putting the cart before the horse, may be. But you haven't any panacea for what's wrong more than I have. All we can hope to do is to make a few trifling alterations on the premises —paper a wall or enlarge a flue—before our lease expires. The chief reason I joined this club was that I might stop theorizing and wringing my hands and get down to business. We all recognize there's plenty of practical work waiting for us, so what's the use of distrusting each other's theories or motives? I've no Congressional bee in my bonnet. I'm not trying to climb to political prominence on the shoulders of the horny-handed Citizens' Club."

Hall colored slightly. He had been harboring just that suspicion.

"Good talk." "Come off your perch, Hall. This man Perry's all right," was the response of several listeners. The group was now a dozen.

Hall took his feet from the table, stood up and put out his hand. "It isn't because the boys say so," he said. "I'm taking you on your own word, Perry, and you'll never hear me peep again. You've the right idea; it's no time for speculat-

ing, for there's lots of business to be done right here in Benham. And if I had a notion you might be masquerading—well, there have been cases where men in patent leathers and dandy collars showed up strong in working-men's clubs, and the only business they ever did was to lay and pull wires."

"Some men are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them," said Ernest Bent. "Hall was born great, but if Don Perry wants to go to the Legislature why shouldn't the Citizens' Club send him there?"

"That's so," said a second.

"Not until he wins those spurs he spoke of—not if he's the man I take him to be," exclaimed Collins, doughtily.

"Not under any circumstances. I have no wish for office. I don't desire to be a politician." Gordon spoke eagerly. The only thought in his mind was to deprecate the suggestion. It was true that in looking over the field there had seemed to him almost a glut of philanthropists, and he had chosen the Citizens' Club as a more promising opening than charitable work. But his ambition was only to be a private in the ranks.

"And yet," commented Hall, "what should we do without politicians? They are the only persons who put things through, and laws on the statute books are what we need. Look at this cigar." He exhibited the butt end, which was all that was left. "The man who gave it to me helped himself to a box, and the only thing he wouldn't help himself to is a red-hot stove, but I didn't spit in his face and I smoked his cigar, and I dare say

he'll vote for some of our batch of bills because I told him a good story. It's disgusting." He threw down the butt and trod it under foot. "The cardinal sin of the sovereign people is their ignorance. Will they never learn not to send dishonest men to represent them?"

"You see that Hall is both an idealist and practical," said Ernest Bent to Gordon. It was through Bent that Gordon had joined the Citizens' Club. He was his next-door neighbor, the son of an apothecary, and had, while following his trade behind the counter, read books on the science of government, and the rights and wrongs of man, with excursions to Darwin and Huxley. As the result of bandying opinions from time to time he had taken Gordon one evening to a meeting of the club, and subsequently invited him to become a member. Gordon did not need persuasion to join. It seemed to him just the opportunity he had been looking for to espouse the cause which he had at heart, by focussing his sympathies on practical measures. He recognized that the club was not only a debating body, but aimed to be a political force, and that many of its members were expert and not entirely scrupulous politicians. But, on the other hand, in spite of the jaundiced views of some of those who harangued the meetings, Gordon discerned that a half-dozen men were really in control—among them Collins and Bent —and that they were guided by a sincere and reasonably cautious ambition to procure scientific reforms. A little consideration convinced him that he was glad they were seeking to wield political influence. It gave the effect of reality, of battle.

Academic discussion was a vital prelude to well-considered action, but, after all, as Hall Collins said, the only thing which really counted was law on the statute books. It suited his manhood to feel that he was about to fight for definite issues.

XIII

AFTER eighteen months of prosperity the law firm into which Gordon Perry had been admitted was crippled by the death of one of the two other partners. The survivor, who was the junior of the two, and decidedly the inferior in mental calibre and energy, proposed to Gordon to continue the firm on the footing of two-thirds of the profits for himself, and appeared pompously grieved when his former student demurred to the terms. Before he could make up his mind to a more equable division Gordon had made up his to separate and to practise alone. While Gordon did not have a very high opinion of his partner's talents, he was grateful for his own recent promotion, and was aware that his associate's wise countenance and seniority combined would probably avail to control the cream of the business—that brought by managers of corporations and successful merchants, both prone to distrust youth. But the plan of setting up for himself was tempting, especially as he disliked the alternative of the lion's share going to a lawyer of mediocre ability, and when Paul Howard asked why he did not take the step in question, and intimated that he would befriend him in case he did, Gordon resolved to burn his bridges and make the plunge, or in more correct metaphor to hang out his own shingle.

As he had expected, there was at first a slight lull in his fortunes; but, on the other hand, he was able to pocket the whole income, and even from the outset he was reasonably busy. Paul Howard's promise was fulfilled. All his personal and presently some of the firm matters were placed in Gordon's hands, and the two men met not infrequently as a consequence. At Harvard they had been acquaintances rather than friends. Their contact on the foot-ball team had inspired respect for each other's grit, but they were not intimate. As the possessor of a liberal allowance, Paul had belonged to a rather frivolous set, notorious in college circles through lavish expenditures, which included boxes at the theatres and suppers and flowers for the chorus girls. Though Gordon was partial to comic opera himself, he had regarded Paul as a high flyer, and Paul in his turn had pitied Gordon as a good fellow spoiled by being obliged to "grind." When they met again in their native city after a lapse of years, each was impressed by the other's improvement and found him much more interesting than he had expected. Paul had toned down. His spirits were less flamboyant; he was gay-hearted instead of noisy, and his manner had lost its condescension. On his part, Gordon had mellowed through contact with the world and was more easy-going in his address, and no longer wore the New England conscience in his nostrils. They met first by chance at a restaurant at noon, and, habit bringing them to the same resort, they lunched together from time to time, and the favorable impression was strengthened on each side.

Gordon interested Paul because the former was so different from most of the men with whom he was in the habit of associating, and yet was, so to speak, a good fellow. The true creed of most of Paul's friends when reduced to terms, was substantially this, that the important thing in life is to be on top, that in America every one has a chance and the best men come to the front, that success means money, that money ensures enjoyment, and that no one is supposed to be enjoying himself or herself who does not keep feeding the dynamo of conscious existence with fresh sensations and run the human machine at full pressure. There were necessary corollaries to this, such as "the devil take the hindmost," uttered considerately but firmly; "we shall be a long time dead," murmured jocosely but shrewdly; and "the cranks may prevail and the crash come, but we shall be under the sod," spoken philosophically, with a shake of the head or a sigh; the moral of it all being that the position of the successful—that is, the rich—is delectable and intoxicating, and the rank and file are expected to comport themselves with patriotic and Christian resignation, and not interfere with the free workings of the million-airium, an ingenious American substitute for the millennium.

The stock market, athletic sports, and cocktails were the tutelary saints of this section of society. They were habitually long or short of the market from one or two hundred to several thousand shares, according to their means. They followed feverishly the prevailing fads in sport, yachting, tennis, polo, rowing, golf, rackets, hunting, horse

shows (as now, a few years later, "bridge," ping-pong, and the deadly automobile). And after exercise, before lunch and dinner, and on every other excuse, they imbibed a cocktail or a whiskey and soda as a fillip to the nervous system. They were dashing, manly-looking fellows, these companions of Paul, ingenious and daring in their business enterprises, or, if men of leisure, keen and brilliant at their games. They set great store by physical courage and unflinching endurance of peril and pain, and they would have responded promptly to a national demand for troops in case of war; but when anything arose on the political or social horizon which threatened to disturb prices on the stock exchange they set their teeth as one man and howled maledictions at it and its author, though it bore the sign manual of true progress. In short, life for them meant a bull market, a galaxy of competitive sports, and perpetual novelty.

In turning from this comradeship and point of view to Gordon Perry, Paul did so guardedly. That is, although he was not altogether satisfied to follow the current in which he found himself, he had no intention of being drawn into the eddies by false sentiment or of rowing up-stream at the dictates of envy and demagogism. He was ready to admit that the policy of high-pressure enjoyment and acquisition might be ethically defective, but he did not propose to exchange his birthright for a mess of pottage and become pious or philanthropic on sing-song lines. As he once expressed it to Gordon, some two years after the latter had set up for himself, between the hypocrites and the

fools it was a comparatively simple matter to charm an audience with a psalm tune compounded of the Rock of Ages and the Star-Spangled Banner until it passed resolutions against the rich and in favor of the poor, which not merely confounded common sense and subverted justice, but gave a sort of moral sanction to the small lies, the sand in the sugar, the dirt, the superstition and the slipshod ways which distinguished the people without brains and imagination from those with.

"We might divide all round," Paul continued, "but what good would that do? I might move into a smaller house, sell my steam yacht and all my stable, except a horse and buggy, and play the Puritan, but what good would that do? People would laugh and my wife would think me crazy. I tell you what, Don, we—I mean the crowd I run with—may be a grasping, extravagant, gambling, sporting, strenuous lot, but we trot square. There's no sand in our sugar, and when there's music to be faced we don't run away, squeal or delude ourselves. But I've sworn off cocktails for good. I began yesterday. And I'm going to keep my eye on you, Don. I don't promise to follow you, but I'm interested. When you get your plans in working order let me look at them. I may be able to syndicate them for you, even though I have to shock my conservative father in the process. By the way, do you happen to need a stenographer? She's said to know her business. And this one is in your line, too."

Gordon had been conscious lately that his work required another clerk. "In my line?"

"Yes. A tale of woe. She's a protegée of my

aunt's, and needs a helping hand. A widow with two small children. Good looking, too, I believe. Mrs. Wilson has had her taught until she can play the type-writer like a learned pig, and take down your innermost thoughts in shorthand. And now the woman insists on being thrown down hard on her own resources, like a good American. We haven't a vacancy, unless I invent one; and it occurred to me that you must have work enough for a second stenographer by this time."

"I'll try her."

"Thanks. One good turn deserves another. I'll tell my aunt that she ought to ask you to dine; and then if you don't give her to understand that her will is all wrong and should be drawn over again the fault will be yours."

"Bankers may advertise their wares in the shop windows, but a self-respecting lawyer may only look wise. He must hold his tongue until he is consulted."

"Squat in his office, eh, like a spider waiting for flies? But you ought to know my aunt all the same."

"I should like to immensely," said Gordon.

"She's not like the rest of the family; she belongs to a different flight. My father has brains and force. It's not easy to equal him in those. He hasn't had time though to sort his ideas and tie them up in nice white packages with crimson bows or to polish anything except his wits. But Aunt Miriam goes in for the perfect life. That's what she has in her mind's eye. You would suit her to death, Don. You ought to be pals. She's absorbed in reforms and æsthetic mission work,

and she has a fine scent for national tendencies, and there's no telling but you might each get points from the other."

Gordon laughed. "You flatter me, Paul."

"No, I don't. You're not alike. You're both aiming at the same thing, I suppose; but your ways are different. And you can't very well both be right. You may not be pals after all. You may disagree and fight. Come to think of it, I shouldn't be in the least surprised if you did. A pitched battle between Gordon Perry and Mrs. Randolph Wilson would be worth watching." Paul chuckled mirthfully at the conception. "I'm not quite sure which of you I would back."

"And now you're enigmatic, not to say absurd."

"Wait until you get to know her; then you'll understand. I should only tie myself up in a bow-knot trying to explain. Her daughter's marriage gave Aunt Miriam her head. If ever there was a case of disappointment, Lucille was one. Aunt Miriam had intended her to be a model of æsthetic sweetness and light, a sort of Matthew Arnold girl with American patent electrical improvements, but she must have been changed at birth. Lucille has her good points—I'm fond of her—but it's a matter of utter indifference to her whether the world improves or not provided she has what she likes. She must have been a constant jar to her mother. Yet I never heard a whimper from Mrs. Wilson. My aunt had no particular use for Clarence Waldo; yet when the thing was settled one could never have guessed from her manner that she was not to be the mother-in-law

of Lord Rosebery or of the author of the great American novel. But now that her mission as a mother is fulfilled, look out for storm centres in the upper lake region of high ideas and fresh winds in reform circles. By the way, the Waldos are in this country again, and are to pass the summer at Newport. My wife says that we are to go there too, with a new steam yacht and all the latest appliances for cutting ice. So you see, I couldn't play the Puritan and the American husband in the same act."

As a result of this conversation, Constance Stuart obtained employment in Gordon Perry's office. When she presented herself he recognized her with surprise as the client whose scrupulous purpose he believed he had divined, though she had given no clue to her instructions. He realized that he was predisposed in her favor, so that she scarcely needed the letter of encomium from Mrs. Wilson, which he paused to read, chiefly because of its chirography and diction. He observed that both her face and figure were a little fuller than when he had seen her last, which was becoming, and that she was more trigly, though simply, dressed. It was clear that she had risen from the ashes of her adversity, and was determined to put her best foot forward. And what an attractive voice and fine eyes she had. As he looked at her he said to himself that she was qualified for the position as one in a thousand; the sort of woman who would understand without becoming obtrusive, who would be neither a machine nor a coquette; and though she was a novice, the endorsement was explicit on the score of her

capacity. Gordon felt that she would give a new atmosphere to his office.

Constance, on her part, was pleased to encounter one not wholly a stranger. Though she had acquired deftness in her work, she felt nervous at actual responsibility, and the memory of the lawyer's kind eyes and frank smile gave her assurance. As she saw him again she was sure that he would be considerate and reasonable. Mrs. Wilson had spoken of an opening in Mr. Howard's office, where she would be one of a roomful of typewriters, but she was glad now that this opportunity had been offered her instead. There would be less excitement and less contact with the hurly-burly of large events, and less chance for promotion and for better pay in case she proved proficient. But, on the other hand, she believed that she would find here a secure and agreeable haven where she could do her best with self-respecting faithfulness and support her children suitably. As she arranged her small effects in the desk provided for her, she concluded already that she was very fortunate.

Just a year had passed since Constance had begun her new life in Lincoln Chambers, and the impulse of that new life may be said to have dated from her visit to Mrs. Randolph Wilson. From that interview and that house she had brought away encouragement and inspiration. The text of the value of the spirit of beauty possessed her soul with the ardor of a new faith. Suddenly and with captivating clearness it had been revealed to her that the external fitness of things is a fact and not to be ignored, and that the purely introspective,

subjective vision sees only half the truth of existence. She perceived that she had been content with rectitude, and unadorned plainness; that she had been indifferent and blind to color, variety, and artistic excellence. It was as though she had been nourished on skimmed milk instead of cream, as though her diet had been a monotonous simple regimen without a lucious ingredient.

To begin with, she had turned her thought to her own home, where cleanliness and order ruled, but where she had hitherto refrained from other than haphazard efforts at pleasing effects. Her idea had been to be comfortable and decent, and to let the rest take care of itself, but now the ambition was awakened to impart taste to her surroundings. To her satisfaction she found that this was not difficult to accomplish even with her modest resources, as her mentor had predicted. Her woman's intelligence and native refinement reinforced her aroused interest, and by altering the angles and position of her furniture, and by introducing a few spots of color to enliven the monotony of her rooms she was able to effect a modest transformation delightful to her own eyes. To plant flowers in boxes for her windows and to arrange the few pictures she owned to advantage was the next step. The modern design of her apartment lent itself to her efforts, as though its newness, its modern tiles and its wall-papers were in league against dull commonplaceness, and it seemed to her presently almost horrible that she had remained indifferent for so long to the necessity of external appearances, absorbed in the processes of introspection. When she and Emil

had married her predominant impulse had been to be a good, loving wife to him, and to make his home inviting by her cheerfulness and tact. The new, clean house had seemed to her pretty in itself, and she had taken for granted that the sets of furniture, the carpets, and other household goods, bought hastily, could not fail to set it forth to advantage. They were substantial, fresh, and paid for, and in her happiness it had not occurred to her to bother further. To do so would have seemed to savor of undue worldliness. Now how far away appeared that time of joyful ignorance, and how foreign to her present sophistication its artless outlook. She had deemed herself cultivated then, and later, in the stress of her misfortunes, had cherished thoughtful simplicity as the essence of personal refinement, the life-buoy to which she clung amid the waste of waters. By the light of experience it was plain that she had starved herself and eschewed as effete or unimportant that which was wholesome and stimulating. The same impulse led her to take a new interest in her own personal appearance, to arrange her hair tastefully, to consider a little what colors suited her best, and in various simple ways to make the most of her own personal advantages for the first time in her life. Not in the spirit of vanity, but in acknowledgment that she had too much neglected the temple of the body. And not only in respect to beauty in the outward manifestations of everyday life did she feel that she had been blind to what existence offered, but where art touched religion. She was able to approach faith from a new point of view; to wrap her naked intellectual

communion with the garment of the church properties—to yield herself to the spell of the solemn architecture, the new stained-glass windows, the artistic reredos, and the vested choir of St. Stephen's—without suspicion or doubt. Her life had lacked the impulse of art, and in finding it she believed that she had discovered the secret of a closer approach to God.

She sought by zeal to make atonement to Mr. Prentiss for her past deficiencies. It did not appear to her essential to recant her errors formally; indeed, she did not do so to herself, for in respect to certain dogmas and supernatural claims of the creed she had not disowned her independence of thought. That which she wished to disown unmistakably was the coldness of her attitude toward spiritual things; she wished her rector to realize that heart was predominating over mind, and that trusting, ardent worship had taken the place of speculative lip service. A sermon by Mr. Prentiss came in the nick of time to further this attitude. It was on the essentials of the religious faith, and he defined them as the spirit of Christian brotherhood and love through man to God. Although he did not in terms disparage the importance of the dogmas and traditions of the church, the impression left on Constance was that he had passed them by as embodying the antiquated letter, but not the modern temper of Christian doctrine. To her eager imagination the doubts which had harassed her in the past concerning the truth of the miracles, and kindred scriptural deviation, from the natural order of the universe were reduced to trivial importance. In-

stead of stumbling-blocks to faith, they had become objects of secondary interest, to one side of the high-road along which the Christ-life was leading mankind.

How better could she manifest this change of mood to Mr. Prentiss than by devotion to church work? She became a teacher in the Sunday-school in the Church of the Redeemer, the mission church connected with St. Stephen's, joined once more a Bible-class under her rector's instruction, and undertook to befriend some poor families less fortunate than herself on the parish lists. But her dearest service was to help to deck the church for the great Christian festivals, Christmas and Easter. To arrange the evergreen and mistletoe, the profusion of lilies and roses, humbly and under the guidance of those versed in such matters, but with devoted hands, gave her a chance to ventilate the new poetry of her soul. She had become enamored of the charm of flowers; she delighted in the swell of the organ and the melodious chants of the rejoicing choir. Her willing fingers quickly became skilful. At the second Easter she was even appealed to on minor points of taste by some of her fellow-workers, so that Loretta Davis, who was standing by holding smilax, nudged her as a sign of congratulation, for she had represented herself to Loretta as a complete novice in such matters. Very grateful and inspiriting to Constance was Mrs. Wilson's voluntary tribute on the same evening that she had been of notable service. Mrs. Wilson was the presiding genius and lady bountiful of these festivals, especially on Easter Day. It was she

who said yearly to Mr. Prentiss, "Date plenis lilia," and, acting on that cue, gave orders to the florists to exhaust the green-houses of the neighborhood, and to spare neither expense nor pains to make St. Stephen's the most beautiful sanctuary in Benham. It was she who organized and tactfully controlled the large committee of ladies whose annual labor of love it was to dress the church. It was she who oversaw and checkmated the commonplace intentions of the professional decorators employed to fasten festoons and clusters beyond the reach of ladylike gymnastics; and it was she who originated or set the seal of approval on the artistic scheme of design adopted by the committee.

Mrs. Wilson had had several triumphs as a consequence of the freedom afforded her by her daughter's marriage, but nothing had given her more satisfaction than the progress of Loretta Davis's redemption through association with Constance. She had jumped at the idea of placing the wayward girl in the opposite tenement, feeling that the experience would be a blessing to both women; that it would provide Loretta with a sympathetic fellow struggler and example, and give Mrs. Stuart the self-respecting occasion to help as well as to be helped. Still it was an experiment until tried, the success of which could not be taken for granted.

That their relations had become sympathetic was due mainly to Constance. In her present mood the unfortunate girl seemed to have been sent to her as an opportunity for Christian usefulness, as a test of her own spiritual regeneration.

Here was the best chance of all to show her changed heart to her rector. Her recognition from the outset that Loretta was distasteful to her, and her shrinking not only from the girl's attitude toward sin but from her smart matter-of-fact personality served merely as a spur to her own zeal. She would win her over and be won over herself; she would unearth the palpitating soul of which Mrs. Wilson had confided to her that she had caught a glimpse, and teach her to reassert and develop her womanhood. Help came unexpectedly from Loretta herself after the ice of acquaintance was broken and the two women found themselves close neighbors. Constance was attracted by the keenness of her intelligence which, though Loretta was ignorant and undisciplined, was apt to go straight to the mark on the wings of rough but pungent speech. It conciliated Constance to discover this trait, for she shrank from self-deception as a moral blemish and one more typical of women than of men. The girl's directness awoke an answering chord. A clear head removed half the difficulty of the situation, and held out the hope that wise counsel would not be lost.

Loretta made no mystery of her circumstances. She told the story of her shame with matter-of-fact glibness as an every-day incident in human life, lamentable possibly on conventional grounds, but not to be judged harshly by the discerning, among whom she chose to place Constance. The thing had happened, and there was nothing to be said or done but make the best of it—which now included the baby.

"She wanted me to keep it, and I said I would,

and that I'd come and live here and see how I liked it. I shocked her and—well, I had never talked with anyone just like her before. She seemed set on my living here, so I thought I'd try."

"She" was always Mrs. Wilson. This was Loretta's invariable way of referring to her, as if there could be no question who was meant. She talked of her constantly, with an eager yet shy interest, which promptly revealed to Constance how matters stood. Loretta had taken up her duties as a mother and subordinated her own wanton theories to please Mrs. Wilson. This was the bond which held her, not religion or the qualms of self-respect. Yet it was a bond, and Constance recognized it as one to be cherished. To hear this woman, so bold and indelicate in every-day speech, ask questions concerning her divinity with a shyness not unlike that of a bashful lover was interesting. Was not she herself under the influence of the same charm? Was not this infatuation another tribute to the power of the spirit of beauty? Thus Constance felt that she had a clue to her new companion's nature, which she did her best to utilize. So it happened that Loretta went to church because she could catch a glimpse of Mrs. Wilson from where they sat; and Loretta took a new interest in her baby from the hour when Mrs. Wilson sent her, tied up with a pretty ribbon, a little embroidered infant's jacket bought at a fair; and Loretta helped to deck St. Stephen's at Easter because of the chance that Mrs. Wilson would speak to her, as of course she did. Constance found herself a silent but zealous conniver and accomplice; and it impressed her that the ob-

ject of devotion seemed instinctively aware both of it and the girl's need, for every now and then Mrs. Wilson would make the occasion by a few words, a note, a visit or a gift to lift Loretta above the level of her own devices. For just as Antæus gained strength by contact with the earth, Loretta's spirit seemed to crave the inspiration of Mrs. Wilson's gracious patronage.

Though slap-dash and over-confident in her ways, Loretta was capable and quick to adopt and to perform skilfully whatever appealed to her. Her experience as a cashier in a drug store had given her a lingo and a certain familiarity concerning modern remedies, and she had a natural aptitude with her hands. Some of the maternal hygienic niceties practised by Constance appeared to amuse her at first, but as she became more interested in her baby, she outdid her neighbor in pharmaceutical experiments with powder, oil, perfume, and whatever she thought likely to make her child a savory specimen of babyhood. When the child was a year old, Mrs. Wilson made good her promise that Loretta should be instructed in nursing by securing her admission to a hospital. At the same time she engaged another of her wards, a responsible, elderly woman, to take up her abode in Loretta's tenement, and it was arranged that this custodian should also tend Constance's children during their mother's absence down-town. How to guard her children properly after their return from school had been agitating Constance, and this plan was exactly to her liking. She paid a small sum weekly from her earnings for the supervision, and it was understood that

Loretta should have the same privilege after her apprenticeship was over and she had become self-supporting. So it was that Mrs. Wilson felt she had reason to be gratified by her philanthropic experiment in Lincoln Chambers.

XIV

THE zest of existence must be largely ethical and subjective for the majority of us or we should speedily become despondent or bored. Contact with life is necessarily so commonplace for the mass of humanity, that, were we dependent on personal participation in large events and dramatic, splendid experiences for inspiration and content, few would not find themselves restless and in the mental doldrums. Fortunately for our peace of mind, most of us not only appreciate that pictorial and world-stirring, or even exciting, affairs can be the lot of only a fraction of mankind, but, by virtue of the imagination, manage to impart to our more or less humble vicissitudes the aspect of an engrossing situation. We recognize the relative insignificance of the individual drama, but its reality holds us. Its characters may be few, its scenery bare, its action trite and simple to other eyes, yet each of us, as the leading actor, finds in the development of a human soul a part which fascinates him, and lends itself to the finest shades of expression. Whether it be a king on his throne, or a cripple in his cot, the essential matter to the world is the nice interpretation. So, as the true artist in a subordinate rôle forgets for the time that he is not the leading actor, we refuse to be depressed by the unimportance of our theatricals

and are absorbed by the unfolding perplexities of our own soul play.

It is every American woman's privilege, according to her tastes, to dream that she may become the wife of the President of the United States, or wield a powerful influence as a poetess, humanitarian educator, or other exponent of modern feminine usefulness. In marrying Emil Stuart, Constance had renounced the latter in favor of the former possibility. She had sacrificed all hopes of personal public distinction, but there still had remained the vision of becoming famous by proxy, through her husband. If this had never appeared to her happy eyes as a bride more than an iridescent dream, the idea that she would presently be working in a lawyer's office would have seemed utterly inconsistent with her scheme of life, and a violation of her horoscope. Yet, now that she was established in this position, she found the experience not only satisfactory, as a means of subsistence, but interesting. In the first place, it stirred her to be down-town in the swift current of affairs and a part of the busy crowd which peopled the huge office-buildings and swept to and from its work with the regularity and rhythmic force of the tide. Through this daily contact she discerned, as never before, the dignity and the pathos of labor, and gained both courage and exhilaration from the thought that, though there were generals and captains, and she was in the rear rank of privates, the real strength of the army lay in the faithful performance by the individual of that portion of the world's toil entrusted to himself or herself. There was attraction, too, in her employment,

though her task was but to register and reproduce with despatch the thoughts of others. The occupation tested her accuracy, patience, tact, and diligence. She must avoid blunders and be swift to comprehend. There were secrets in her keeping; affairs upon the issue of which hinged large sums of money, and often the happiness of leading citizens, who were clients of the office; close legal battles between mind and mind; domestic difficulties settled out of court; and suits for injuries, where the price of a life or of a limb were at stake. Her lips must be sealed, and she must seem unaware of the tragedies which passed beneath her observation. Yet the human element became a constant, vivid interest to her, and now and then it happened, as, for instance, when a forlorn hope brought liberal damages to the wronged or the afflicted, that she was taken into the secret by the exultant plaintiff, and was able to rejoice openly.

There was, finally, her association with her employer. From this she had not expected much. She was there to execute his instructions without superfluous words or the obtrusion of her own personality. She knew, instinctively, that he would not treat her merely as a machine, but she took for granted that their relations would be formal. It pleased her that, though this was the case, there were moments, even from the first, when he let her perceive that he regarded her as a social companion. To evince a kindly interest in her personal affairs was simply human; anyone might show this; but to talk with her on the topics of the day, to call her attention to a book or an article, or, as presently happened, to invite her opinion on

There were moments, even from the first, when he let her perceive that he regarded her as a social companion

a question of legal ethics, was a flattering indication that he considered their point of view the same. A difference in point of view is the most insurmountable, because the most intangible, barrier to the free play of human sympathy and the social instinct. It is the last great fortress in the pathway of democracy; one which the besiegers will be able to carry only by learning the password. A free-masonry exists, from the cut of the mind to that of the hair and coat, between those who recognize each other, and not to speak the same language palsies the best intentions. Modest as her introduction to Mrs. Randolph Wilson had made her, Constance in her heart believed that she spoke the same mental language as Mr. Perry. But would he recognize it? That he did so not only increased her interest in serving him, but held out the promise of a new friend. He might so easily have passed her over, he who was so busy and had so many acquaintances. Yet it was plain that he liked to talk to her, and that he availed himself of opportunities for conversation. At the end of a year it happened that the other stenographer, her predecessor, left Mr. Perry's employment in order to marry. As a consequence, Constance became the senior clerk, and was given formal charge of the office with a slight increase in pay.

She would scarcely have been human had Gordon Perry's complimentary interest failed to inspire her with some degree of hero-worship. Yet, though she was presently aware that she had set him on a pedestal, she felt that she had excellent reasons for her partiality. Was he not a clear-headed, astute reasoner, as well as kind? A thor-

ough, conscientious worker, who went to the root of whatever he undertook, and prosecuted it vigorously, as well as a gracious spirit with a sense of humor? If she did not reveal much of the last quality herself, she appreciated and enjoyed it in others, especially when it was the sort of humor which championed truth against error and could be playful or caustic, as the occasion demanded. He was simple and approachable, yet he had influential and fashionable friends. Recently he had made the acquaintance of Mrs. Randolph Wilson, and was on pleasant terms with her. Constance had recognized her handwriting, and had been apprised by Loretta of his presence at Mrs. Wilson's entertainments. Loretta had, what seemed to Constance, almost a mania for the social department of newspapers. She knew by rote the names of the society leaders, and was familiar through reportorial photography with many of their faces. Mrs. Wilson was the bright, particular star in this galaxy of interest. Loretta searched with avidity for every item of gossip which concerned her divinity, and took a hectic pleasure in retailing her information. Thus it happened that every now and then she would exclaim: "I see that your boss was at her last entertainment," the fact of which was more agreeable to Constance than the phraseology. Loretta's diction was always clear, but Constance, who wished to feel that they spoke the same language, had often to bite her lips as a reproof to her sensibilities; and, especially, when she heard her hero spoken of as her boss. It was so wide of the truth regarding him.

Then there was his mother, and here again Con-

stance had cause to feel gratified. Quite unexpectedly Mrs. Perry had called upon her, seeking her at Lincoln Chambers in the late afternoon when she was likely to be at home. While serving her five o'clock tea, Constance had observed, with interest in her personality, marked resemblances to her son. He had inherited her naturalness and mental vigor. Her cheerful directness, too, but in his case the straightforward attitude was softened by the habit of deliberation and garnished by a more tolerant gaiety. It was obvious that Mrs. Perry maintained the integrity of her convictions until they ran counter in daily life to his, and in capitulating reserved always the privilege to be of the same opinion still, which she exercised with her tongue in her cheek, thereby betraying her great pride in her son, and in her son's superior wisdom. She professed, for instance, to regard his ideas concerning the new home in which he had just installed her, and where she was keeping house for him, as extravagant. What was the use of spending so much on mere creature comforts? She did not need them. She had sat on straight-backed chairs all her days and preferred them, and she did not require a telephone to order her marketing.

"When I was young," she said to Constance, "there was only one set bath-tub in a house, if any, and no modern plumbing. We carried hot water upstairs in pails, and those who drew water from the boiler poured in as much as they took. But there are so many labor-saving machines to-day, that sheer laziness is at a premium. Gordon declares that I'm all wrong, and that more people are clean and comfortable as a consequence. Then,

as to the wall-papers and carpets and upholstery, well, they're pretty, I can't deny that. But, somehow, it goes against my grain to see so many bright colors. Yet when I say it looks frivolous, Gordon simply laughs. So I've promised to hold my tongue until everything is finished, and to let him have his way. He likes to have his way almost as much as I do mine, Mrs. Stuart, and the strangest part is that, though he doesn't always convince me, I have a secret feeling that he must be right."

Constance was taken to see the new house in one of the outlying and more fashionable wards of the city, which, as Mrs. Perry had declared, was supplied with all the modern improvements and was being furnished with an eye to artistic taste. It became evident that the old lady, despite her misgivings, was very proud at heart of the whole establishment, but that her satisfaction centred in the library—her son's room—a cosey, spacious apartment with tall shelves for his books and various conveniences adapted to a bachelor and a student. As standing on the threshold, she exhibited it to her guest with a shy pride, which almost seemed to gasp at the effects disclosed, she murmured: "It sometimes seems to me a wicked waste of money; but I'm glad to think he's going to be so comfortable."

Constance replied, "It's a delightful room. Just the place, restful to the body and stimulating to the spirit, which a busy man like Mr. Perry ought to have."

"There can be nothing too good for him, if that's what you mean."

"I heartily assent," said Constance, smiling. "And I agree with your son that it is sensible and right to surround oneself with pretty things if one has the means."

"I guess that he must have talked it over with you," said the old lady, with a keen glance.

"No."

"Well, it's a wonder he hasn't, for he sets store by your opinion on lots of things. In my day, compliments weren't considered good for young people, but I don't believe from your looks that you'll work any the less well because I let you know what he thinks of you. He was saying the other day that he feared you must find thumping on that machine of yours, week in and week out, and taking down letters in double-quick time, dull work, and I told him that a woman of the right sort, with two children to support, had no time to feel dull or to think about her feelings, but was thankful for the chance of steady employment. You see I know something about that myself. You have your boy and girl to keep your thoughts busy, just as I had him."

"Yes, indeed. But it is a pleasure to work for Mr. Perry. No man is a hero to his valet, and need not be, I suppose, to his stenographer. You won't think it presumptuous of me to say that he has been very considerate, and that I enjoy taking down his words because he is so intelligent and so thorough?"

"There's no one who likes to hear nice things said about him so well as his mother. There's only one fault about him, so far as I know, and that may be cured any day. He's a bachelor. I would

move straight out of this house to-morrow in order to see him well married."

"That wouldn't be necessary, I imagine, Mrs. Perry."

"Yes, it would. I should make a detestable mother-in-law. Gordon gets his clear-headedness from me, and I know my own faults. I shouldn't be jealous, but I should wish her to do things in my way, and she would wish to do them in hers, so we should clash. I wouldn't risk it. But I'd be willing to die to-morrow and never to kiss my grandchildren if only he had a good wife. I should be very particular, though."

"I should think so. I hope with all my heart that he may meet a woman worthy of him." Constance was a little surprised by her own fervor. Expressed in sound it seemed to her almost familiar. Then, without knowing why, she sighed. Was it because she painfully recalled that marriage was a lottery?

Mrs. Perry evidently ascribed the sigh to that source, for after regarding her a moment, she said softly, "It was easier for me than it is for you. When I lost my husband we were very happy. You are left alone. You see my son has told me your story."

"I am glad that you should know."

"But you are young, my dear. Young and a charming looking, lovable woman. The right man may come along. Who knows?"

Constance stared at her in astonishment. "My husband is not dead," she said, a little formally.

"Yes, I know. He deserted you."

"But he is alive."

"Gordon told me that you had not been divorced."

"I have never thought of such a thing."

"You know where he is?"

"I have not seen him or heard from him since the day he left me nearly three years ago."

"Precisely."

"He is the father of my children, however."

For a moment Mrs. Perry seemed to be pondering the thesis contained in her single word of deduction, and her visitor's reply. Then she bent her shrewd eyes on Constance, and said with a quiet pithiness of utterance, which reminded the latter of her employer. "I was not tempted to marry again because I loved my husband, and could not forget him. But I've never been able to convince my common sense that it is fair to asperse the woman who marries again after the law has separated her forever from the man who has done her a grievous wrong, but to think it only right and fitting for a widow to take a second husband when the first whom she has loved, and who has loved her, is in the grave. If I were a young woman on my death-bed, I expect I couldn't make up my mind to beg my husband to marry again. But I couldn't blame him if he did. It's the way of human nature, often as not. It's hateful to be lonely. And why shouldn't the girl marry again, who has been left in the lurch by a cruel man, who has been false to the vow he took to support and protect her? Only the other day a rich merchant whom my son knows, a man of over sixty, who had lived with his wife for thirty years, married again before she had been dead twelve months,

and they had a solemn church wedding. It was your clergyman, Mrs. Stuart, who married them. I'd call it disgusting, except that some people said he was solitary, although he had daughters. But to make fish of one and flesh of the other, isn't just. I'm an old woman, and the longer I live the more I dote on justice."

"I remember now. I know whom you mean. Loretta insisted on reading me the account of it from the newspaper. I've seen him in church. He is one of the vestrymen."

"Yes, it was a society function. But I don't judge him," said Mrs. Perry, sitting up straight to emphasize her intention to be dispassionate. "Men are queer. His wife was dead, and he had the right to ask another woman to fill her place. But why, then, should anyone criticise you?"

"Have you heard anyone criticise me?" Constance asked, hoping to extricate the conversation from the depths of this argument by a ripple on the surface.

"Some of them would. You did yourself, you know."

"It was a new idea to me. I have never thought of marrying." After a moment's silence, she added, simply: "How would you like your son to marry a divorced woman, Mrs. Perry?"

Her mind had picked out, instinctively, the crucial question. The old lady gave a little gasp and start.

"A divorced woman? Gordon?" Then she laughed. "The way you said 'divorced woman' had a formidable sound." The personal application was evidently a surprise to her; evidently, too,

it interested her, and she wrestled with it sitting erect and bright-eyed. In another moment she had worked out the answer to her own satisfaction. "It would depend upon her—what she was like. If she were innocent—if she had been grossly wronged, and had sought the relief from her distress which the laws allow, and I liked her and he loved her, I shouldn't object. Or, put it in this way: I should prefer that Gordon did not marry a widow, but a girl with all the freshness of her life before her."

"Yes, indeed," murmured Constance.

"But plenty of young men fall in love with widows and marry, and no one thinks any the worse of the widows, or of them. I'd fully as lief Gordon married a divorced woman as one who had buried her husband. And if I were sure she was a fine woman, I can imagine my sentiment vanishing like moonshine, and my not minding a bit."

Constance shook her head thoughtfully. "He must marry some fine, sweet girl without a past," she said with gentle positiveness.

"Amen to that, my dear. And the sooner the better."

One day early in September, in the summer following the date of this conversation, Paul Howard entered the office. As he passed into Gordon's private room, omitting the gay greeting which he was wont to exchange with her, Constance noticed that his expression was grave and tense, and that he looked tired. She said to herself that his summer at Newport could not have rested him.

It was Paul's second season at Newport. In

accordance with his half-humorous prediction, he had hired there, the previous summer, one of the most desirable villas, a spacious establishment with a superb outlook to sea. He had maintained a large steam yacht, and an elaborate stable, and had entertained lavishly. All to please his wife. At least so he regarded it, and this was in a large measure the truth. Ever since his marriage, five years back, Paul had been thinking that he would like to spend his vacation in some cool, picturesque spot, far from scenes of social display, where with his wife he could enjoy the beauties of nature unreservedly, and recuperate from the fatigues of the winter. But, though he had hankered after this in theory, and had broached the project to Mrs. Howard, somehow it had never come to pass, and he had been secretly aware for some time that it never would, unless one of them had nervous prostration and were ordered away by a physician. For when one is a millionaire and has an ambitious wife, one gets into the way of doing what other millionaires do, and becomes acclimated to the amusements proper to millionaires, until presently the necessity of having luxuries at one's fingers' ends makes any other programme seem insipid and a bore. Those who neglect to follow their own tastes cannot fail to be moulded by the tastes which they adopt. We readily habituate ourselves to our surroundings, whether it be too few baths, or too many. Paul delighted in the plumbing facilities of his establishment. He was perpetually taking baths and changing his underclothes, and the apprehension lest this orgie be interfered with had taken the edge off his desire for closer con-

tact with the beauties of nature. He recognized the change in himself, but charged it to the account of the spirit of the age, that convenient depository of modern philosophers. So, by the end of that first summer, he had found himself content rather than otherwise with the experience and disposed to return. To begin with, his wife was enthusiastic. As she expressed it, she had had the time of her life, which was comforting. Although from Monday morning to Thursday night had been spent by him in New York (he had arranged to be absent from Benham during the summer months and take temporary charge of the New York office), the rest of the week was passed at Newport, and for the trip he had his own comfortable yacht. Besides, he took a fortnight in August, during the time of the New York Yacht Club cruise, with its opportunities to meet familiarly men of importance in the financial world. There was golf and riding and driving, his baths and cocktails. If he found the widely advertised, and rather foolish, extravagant entertainments in dog-day August, to which his wife dragged him, tedious, he could generally slip away early if she wished to stay to dance, and often he could manage to be in New York when they occurred. Besides, since to be present at them seemed to be regarded as social recognition, he was gratified to be treated as a millionaire would wish to be treated in the society of millionaires. To go, or at least to be represented by his wife, who made his excuses most charmingly he was told, showed that he had not been left out, which is the controlling reason why people go to festivities at Newport,

except to those where trinkets of real value are given away in the course of the evening. Paul had fully intended to renounce cocktails. In fact, he had sworn off at Benham; but since they appeared to take the place of a grace before meat at every gathering of Newport's fashionable male contingent, he had yielded again like a good fellow to the spirit of the age just for one summer. One swallow does not make a summer, as we all know, and similarly, destiny often requires more than one summer to carry the spirit of the age to its logical conclusions. This is true of the effect of cocktails on the coats of the stomach, according to the best medical authorities. But we are not considering that here. Indeed, the working out process which Paul now found confronting him was outside of himself and concerned him chiefly as a victim. If his first summer at Newport had been propitious, taking all things, including the spirit of the age, into consideration, the second had been productive of momentous issues. It was in relation to these that Paul had come to consult Gordon Perry, his friend and legal adviser

XV

GORDON PERRY looked up from his desk with an air of surprise. "Why, Paul, I thought you'd shaken the dust of Benham from your feet until the last of the month." Then noticing his client's face as they joined hands, he added, "I hope nothing has gone wrong."

"Everything is wrong." Paul seated himself with grave deliberation. "Are you at leisure? What I have to consult you about will take some time."

"No one shall disturb us."

"It isn't business." Then, after a moment's silence, "It's my wife. She has betrayed me."

"Your wife betrayed you?" Gordon, as in his bewilderment he echoed the words, recalled a woman with a dainty figure, a small, sphinx-like mouth, full cheeks devoid of color, and black hair. He had never been at Paul's house, but he had been introduced to her, and he had frequently seen her and her little girl driving in her victoria, a picture of up-to-date fastidiousness. At the time of her marriage she had been called the prettiest girl in Benham. She was the daughter of a St. Louis contractor with a reputation for executive ability, who had moved to Benham in her childhood to become the president of a car-building company. Paul's friends had intimated that he had gone rather out of his way to marry her.

Certainly it had been considered a brilliant match for her.

"Yes. It's a pretty kettle of fish, as you'll appreciate when you hear the story; a hopeless case so far as our living together is concerned. I've come to you for advice and to talk it over, though she and I threshed out the situation four days ago.

"May I smoke? Thanks. You don't here, I know; but I go from cigar to cigar to keep my nerves straight, for I'm still dazed, and I haven't slept much."

"It's ghastly," murmured Gordon.

"Now that I look back I suppose I ought to have realized that she never really cared for me. Perhaps the gradual, unconscious perception of that reacted on me. I fell dead in love with her looks, and would have worshipped the ground she trod on had she proved what I thought her to be. As it is, I'm humiliated, angry, disgusted, all at sea. But I can see that we should never be happy together again. Love in the true sense is over on both sides. I tell you this, Gordon, to begin with. You haven't heard anything?"

"Not a word."

"I thought it likely they had copied the item from the Newport into the Benham newspapers. Five nights ago I popped at a man in my house with a revolver—a long shot—just as he was escaping over the balcony outside my wife's apartment, and missed. At the moment I would have given half my fortune to kill him. I dare say, it's just as well I didn't. There would have been a bigger scandal. It was one o'clock, and someone who heard the noise—servants, I know not who—

talked, and two days later there appeared in one of the newspapers an allusion to the mysterious midnight pistol shot on the Howard place. A reporter called on me; I declined to see him, but my butler, who can be trusted, had instructions to say I was shooting cats. That's all the public knows as yet. Here's a nice problem for the women's debating clubs: A man discovers his wife's lover in his place; ought he to shoot him like a rat on the spot, or accept the situation for what it is worth, just as he has to accept a death in the family, a fire, or any other visitation of Providence? Eh?" Paul gave a short laugh. "Of course the primitive man shot every time. But we can remember one husband who did shoot and who killed, and that all the exquisite people and some of the wise people shook their heads and declared he ought to have thought of his daughters. There was a world-wide scandal, and after the funeral we were told that the husband had always been a crank, in proof of which he died later in an insane asylum, while his wife has hovered on the outskirts of the smart set ever since as a sort of blessed martyr to the rigor of conventions. No, my dear fellow, the only decent thing for me to do now is to compromise myself deliberately with some common woman, so as to give my wife the chance to obtain a divorce from me. That is the duty of the gallant modern husband, according to the nicest and latest fashionable code."

"You will do nothing of the kind, Paul."

"Wait until you have mulled over it as I have. For the sake of my little girl her mother's reputation must be sacred."

"I see. Then her misconduct is not known?"

"It's a profound secret. That is, no one has seen her in the act, but it seems that all Newport except myself has taken it for granted and been whispering about it all summer. It began last summer, dolt that I was. But it's not known officially. That is, the newspapers have not got on to it." Paul made a movement of impatience and, rising, took a turn or two across the office. He stopped in front of Gordon and said: "Mind you, the temptation to kill him like a rat was not presented to me. I don't say I would have done it. I don't know what I would have done under all the circumstances—the gruesome circumstances —had we been face to face and he unarmed. He heard me and fled by the window. I was in the ante-room and stepped out on the balcony, and running round merely saw a disappearing figure. I did not know who he was, but I surmised; and on the spur of the moment I felt it was almost a hopeless shot. Who do you suppose he was?"

"I have no idea, of course."

"Guess."

"It would be useless. I know no one at Newport except yourself, Paul."

"Oh, yes, you do. Here's situation number two in the tragedy. It was my cousin Lucille's husband, Clarence Waldo."

"For Heaven's sake!" Gordon ejaculated. "It can't be possible."

Paul's laugh broke forth again. "Stunning, isn't it? No dramatist can improve on that. But I can. I know what you're thinking," he said, folding his arms, as he stood before Gordon with

a saturnine glee, as though he were enjoying the other's consternation. "You're wondering what Mrs. Wilson will say?"

Gordon shook his head. "It is terrible for her, of course. But I was thinking of your poor cousin."

"Spare your pity in that quarter, man, until you know the truth. Situation number three! Lucille and her husband have fallen out, agreed to differ, ceased to love each other, never have loved each other, and are to be divorced as soon as circumstances will permit. Waldo is to marry my wife, and she—Lucille—has plighted her troth to Bradbury Nicholson, of New York, a son of the president of the Chemical Trust, of whom she is enamoured, and with whom, it seems, she has been carrying on clandestinely for months. Didn't I tell you I could improve on myself? The curtain now to red fire and the strains of Tschaikowsky!"

Paul flung himself into his chair, and squared his jaw. For a moment he looked like his father.

Gordon gazed at him with a brow of dismay. "How do you know this?"

"From my wife. She made a clean breast of their affairs, and seemed to be rather surprised that I didn't know. It's all cut and dried. That is, it is to work out that way in the end, and soon, if I'm accommodating. And I am expected to be. After the first flare-up, which was all on my part, and did not take place until next morning, we talked in our ordinary voices, as we are talking now." Since the climax of his narration, Paul's sensational tone had ceased. He seemed simply tired, as though he had been suddenly let down.

"She set me the example. You know her face. She looked whiter than ever, but was perfectly clear and explicit. She said it was evident we were not suited to each other. Although I agreed with her, I was fool enough to ask her why, and she intimated politely, but clearly, that I bored her—said we did not care for the same things. She admitted that I was not to blame for that, and that I had been very generous in money matters. Then we talked and we talked and we talked, at that time and again in the evening, until the small hours. The upshot is, we're to be divorced as soon as it can be arranged. She is to desert me, or I her. She seemed to be posted as to the law. Or, whatever way you suggest. I've given in. She appealed to my common sense, as she called it. She told me that we had made a mistake, that we both knew it, and that the sooner we recognized it, the better. That there need be no disagreeable publicity beyond the fact that we were no longer to be husband and wife. I couldn't deny that my love for her was dead. The only difficult question was the child. Neither of us wished to give her up, and each of us would like to have her all the time."

"Poor little thing!"

"Yes, indeed. When I thought of Helen, I told my wife at first that I was ready to preserve the outward forms of living together, in the teeth of her unfaithfulness, for the sake of our child. But she told me that I was old-fashioned. She asked whether I thought it would be worse for Helen, or whether Helen would be less happy to live as we should mutually arrange than to grow

up in a wretched household, where the father and mother were utterly at variance. That was a poser. It's the devil either way. What do you think?"

"It's the devil, as you say. Amen, to that! But if it's got to be—got to be," Gordon reiterated, "I'm inclined to think your wife was right in terming your protest old-fashioned. Where a marriage is utterly blasted, to retain the husk merely for the sake of the children must fail, it seems to me, in nine cases out of ten, to accomplish its purpose—to preserve what society is pleased to call the sanctity of the home."

"There would not be much sanctity left in mine," Paul murmured. "However, when she saw that I was determined to have my full share of Helen, or fight, we came to terms. Helen is to spend her winters with me, her summer vacations with her mother; or some such arrangement; and, of course, I am to provide for the child." Paul paused reflectively. "I don't think it ever occurred to my wife that we do not stand on an equal footing, and that she would not be the best of moral influences for a daughter. It seems to be an answer to everything that we were not sympathetic, and that she has met somebody who is; her affinity, as they say. I had observed her intimacy with Waldo, and was aware of some cases at Newport where women had compromised themselves with other women's husbands; and, though I didn't exactly fancy Waldo's attentions, and had hinted to her twice my disapproval—to which the first time she pleaded surprise, and the second, shrugged her shoulders—I never divined the truth

until I received this." He drew a letter from his pocket and handed it to Gordon. "Even then, I couldn't believe the worst."

Gordon perused the contents of the envelope, a single sheet of paper on which were the words: "When the cat's away, the mice will play."

"Humph! Anonymous!" he said.

"She asked me what brought matters to a crisis, and I told her. She thinks it must have been sent by a maid whom she discharged. I received it at my New York office in the middle of the week, and the following Sunday night, instead of leaving Newport in my yacht, as usual, I pretended to do so, and returned late to my house on foot. The rest you know. It may be I was too much absorbed in my business. However, it's all over now, and it's best it should be over. What I wish is advice as to the necessary steps; that you should tell me what I ought to do."

"As to a divorce?"

"Yes. She is to follow my instructions in regard to it."

"And what as to the others—the Waldos?"

"No wonder you ask. I put the same question to her, and she told me that I needn't concern myself about them; that they would find a way."

"There are certainly various ways if people choose to connive at divorce. There are certain States where the residence essential to give the court jurisdiction can be obtained in a pitifully short time—even as short as three months, and where an agreement to live apart is allowed, through lack of scrutiny, to pass for genuine desertion. If Mrs. Waldo and her husband have

both been guilty of infidelity, neither is entitled to a decree of divorce in any court of justice. But that concerns them, not you. I was merely voicing the regret which every decent man feels that there shouldn't be a uniform law in all our States. But here one runs up against the vested rights of sovereign peoples. It's a far cry from South Carolina, where no divorce is granted for any cause whatever, to Wisconsin or Colorado, where desertion for one year is sufficient. Yet, if one had to choose between the two, there is less injustice and more regard for the welfare of society in the latter extreme, radical as it is, than in the former. Whatever happens, the world will never go back to marital chains and slavery." Turning to the book-case at his elbow, Gordon selected a law book and opened it. "I don't hanker after divorce cases, but I'm very glad you have come to me, Paul. I was simply shocked, at first; let me tell you now how heartily sorry I am for you."

"Thank you, Don. I knew you would be. As to my cousin, Lucille, I cannot say, positively, that she has taken the final step—actually sinned. My wife admitted that she had no real knowledge, though she took the worst for granted. But it is certain that the marriage is at an end, that she and her husband are hopelessly alienated, and that at the first opportunity she will marry this young Nicholson. As to myself, you agree with me, don't you, that a divorce is the only possible, the only sensible, course to adopt?"

Gordon paused a moment before replying. "The only possible, no; the only sensible—since you ask me as a friend as well as a client—in my

opinion, yes. It's a point which every man must decide for himself, if it confronts him. Some people would say to you that you should stick to your wife, not live with her necessarily, but refuse to break the bond; that she might repent and return to you. It seems to me, though, that if my wife had been false to me and my love for her were dead, I would not allow such a sentiment—and it is only sentiment—to tie me forever to a woman who was no longer my wife, except in name. Your life is before you. Why should a vitiated contract be a bar between you and happiness? You may wish to marry again."

Paul shook his head.

"Naturally you don't think so, now. But why not?"

"As George the Second said, '*j'aurai des maitresses,*' " Paul answered, a little bitterly.

"Exactly!" exclaimed Gordon, with eagerness. "The continuance of such a bond would be a premium on immorality. That's a point which sentimentalists do not take sufficiently into account. Why is it necessary to marry again, they ask. For one thing, because a man's a man, as you and I know. It's a new question to me, Paul, because, though it's one of the questions ever on the surface, I have never had to deal with it squarely until now. The more I think of it the more sure I am that a divorce would be sensible, and more than that, sensible in the highest sense, without a jot or a tittle of deprecation. I know; you don't wish to have to apologize. All I can say is, if I were in your shoes, I would do the same. You have a right to your freedom."

"I couldn't see it in any other light. Besides, my wife is bent on being free, herself. If I do not apply for a divorce, she will—and in the shortest way."

"As to the method," continued Gordon, after a moment's scrutiny of the volume before him, "it is simple enough—a mere question of time. In this State where a party is guilty of a cause for divorce—as in this case, infidelity—the injured party is justified in leaving the home, and after such separation has continued for the statutory period, the injured party may obtain a divorce for desertion. Or, simpler still, your wife can desert you, and after the necessary time has elapsed, the same result would follow. The statutory period is three years."

"My wife will not like that."

"It is the only course, if she desires to preserve her reputation. If she prefers to have you bring a libel for divorce on the ground of infidelity, she can be free in a much shorter time. Also she could obtain her liberty somewhat sooner by changing her residence to a more accommodating jurisdiction and asking a divorce from you. Provided you offered no opposition, she might succeed, but that would be a back-handed method discreditable to you both, and an evasion of the laws of this State, which might, hereafter, be productive of unpleasant complications. It's a sad business, but you should have a clean job."

"Assuredly. We could separate at once?"

"Yes. But one of you must actually desert the other. An agreement to live apart does not constitute legal desertion. On the other hand, if she

were to leave your house, the court would not inquire what was going on in your mind, provided you did not show by any overt sign that you wished to get rid of her. You can be glad, but you must not say so."

"I understand. She need not be burdened with my presence from the outset. As for marrying Waldo, she must wait her three years."

"And she may be thankful that she will be able to marry as soon as the divorce is absolute. In some States the person against whom a divorce is granted, is forbidden to marry altogether, or for a period of years as a punishment. To forbid marriage altogether, in such cases, appears to me another premium on immorality. To forbid it for a time, may sometimes prevent indecent haste on the part of the guilty, but it is a good deal like keeping after school children who have been naughty. Besides, the party forbidden to marry, as in New York, for instance, has merely to step into New Jersey and be married, and the second marriage will be held legal by the New York courts and everywhere else."

Paul was silent for a few moments. "That seems to me a decent programme. My wife can go to Europe, and—and when the time is up, marry Waldo. It's easy as rolling off a log." He clapped his strong hand on the wooden arm of his chair, so that it resounded. "My father will be terribly cut up. My aunt—God knows what she will say or do. As for myself"—he paused while he lit a fresh cigar—"I shall have to go into politics."

"Politics?"

"Yes. I'd like to go to Congress." Paul sat back in his chair with the air of one taking a fresh brace on life. "I've always intended to, sooner or later. Had it at the back of my mind. But now—well, if I were sent to Washington, and presently got a foreign mission, my wife might feel sorry for a few minutes that I bored her. Yet I wouldn't have her back. Waldo is welcome to her. The real reason," he added, suddenly, after another pause, "is that I've been asked. One of the Republican State Committee spoke to me about it in June, just before I went to Newport. The election isn't until a year from this autumn. I told him I'd think it over. I've got to do something to counteract this disgrace, and to forget it. Well, I must be going. I'll see you again as soon as I hear from my wife."

Gordon detained him. "You mustn't take too despondent a view of it. After all, it's not your fault, it's your misfortune. All your friends will recognize that; and no one will be able to understand how any woman could weary of the love of a man like you, and prefer a listless, pleasure-seeker, such as Clarence Waldo."

Paul shrugged his shoulders. "It's the spirit of the age, I suppose. I'm not sorry, I tell you, but I'm piqued. We are shells upon the beach. The tide sweeps us along even though we know it is the tide, and can say of the next man, 'what a fool he is, to drift like that!' But what is a fellow to do? How is he to escape? I'm a millionaire—I'm likely to be several times that if nothing breaks. I didn't wish to go to Newport, but I went. I don't care for half the things I

do, but they have to be done; that is, I do them of my own accord, when the time comes, and, though I kick, I know I should regret not doing them merely because they seem to be the proper things for people of my kind. There you are. I have a sort of double self, as you know. It isn't that I'm weak, it's—what do you call it?—the force of my environment. And a millionaire's environment has a pressure of two hundred pounds to the square inch. It's the same with the women. What with rich food, splendid apparel, perpetual self-indulgence, and the power which money gives them to gratify every whim, is it any wonder that they don't let a little thing like the marriage vow stand in the way of their individual preferences? Who is to hold them to account? The church? Some of them go to church, but in their hearts they are satisfied that this is the only world. And as to loss of social position—of which they really would be afraid—the tide is with them. There are too many sympathizers. Or at least, it is inconvenient to be obliged to hurt other people's feelings in a free country."

"Rather a formidable indictment against Newport," said Gordon.

"It isn't against Newport. It's against the plutocracy all over the country. Newport merely happens to be the place where very rich men with social instincts most do congregate in summer. My domestic tragedy is typical, yet sporadic. Every season has its crop, but, numerically, it is small. Infidelity is only one of the phases of the spirit—but the spirit is rampant. Money-money-money, luxury-luxury-luxury, self-self-self (indi-

vidualism, they call it), and in the process everything is thrown overboard, except the American flag, and life becomes one grand hurrah, boys, with no limitations, save murder and lack of physical cleanliness. And I belong to the procession, my dear fellow. I'm disgusted with it at the moment, that's why I rail. But in six months I shall be in it again. See if I'm not."

"You're simply depressed, Paul, and no wonder," said Gordon, with genial solicitude. "But we mustn't judge our plutocracy—aristocracy, or whatever you choose to call the personal representatives of the prosperity of the country—by the antics of a few, disgusting as they are. I agree that their behavior apes the frivolity and license of the old French court without its elegance, and I don't suppose that the founders of our institutions ever included a leisure class as a part of their scheme. Absorbed in ideals, they neglected to take poor human nature sufficiently into account. We have lost the buffalo, but we have acquired a leisure class, and we must make the best of it, not the worst. We can't cut their heads off; this is a free country. It would be dreadful—dreadful, wouldn't it, if our institutions, of which we are so proud, were to produce merely the same old thing over again—a leisure class of voluptuaries?" Gordon paused for a moment and his smile died away at the vision which his words evoked. "I don't intend to believe it; you don't. There are students of destiny who maintain that nations rise, reach maturity and decline by regular economic laws, but that human nature never really improves. That's fatalism.

The free play of human individualism is having its last grand chance here in these United States. If our aristocracy proves no better than any other —if the rich and powerful are to sneer at morals and wallow in licentiousness, we couldn't blame society if it should try a strong dose of socialism, with its repressing, monotonous dead level, rather than accept the doctrine that the law of supply and demand is the sole ruler of the universe. But as good Americans we can't afford to judge our plutocracy, as yet, by the vices of a few people at Newport."

"They sin in such a cold-blooded way," said Paul. "If they really cared, as some of the foreigners do, one could understand; but they don't."

"I know. It's one of the canons of old-world traditions that adultery is almost redeemed by the possession of an artistic sense. To commit the one without possessing the other, may be no worse morally, yet it seems much more vulgar. But we mustn't take them too seriously, even though they are our countrymen and women. They are the exceptions—the excrescences. Look at your father, for instance. He belongs to them—but he is not of them. The same is true of yourself; and it is a privilege, with all its responsibilities, a privilege I envy you. Who wouldn't be a multi-millionaire if he could? What is more alluring than power?"

Paul returned the pressure of his friend's hand. "You're a good fellow, Don. I suppose I'm hipped. That's not my way, as you know. Usually everything with me is rose color; I'm too good an American, if anything." He buttoned his well-fitting coat with a dignified air, as though the

pride of the suggestion had stirred his pulses like a brass band. "The trouble is, that when I'm feeling well, everything goes, and the only thing which seems of importance is to come out ahead of the other fellow. So we kick over standards and degenerate. This time I've been struck with a club, and—and I don't see that it's my fault. Well, good-bye. As soon as I hear, I'll let you know."

XVI

THERE was only one shadow on Constance's present happiness, for she was happy in her independence and her work. She had demonstrated her ability to support herself and to defy the blow of fate which had deprived her of a husband's aid and protection. It was the growing perception that she might not be able to do all she desired for her children. This sprang from her own keener appreciation of the value not only of the best educational advantages, but of refined personal surroundings in the development of character. She could inculcate noble morals; she could teach her children to be truthful, brave, and simple; she could provide them with public school instruction, and she was resolved to give them, if her health remained good, the opportunity to continue their education longer than was the wont with parents whose offspring had their own way to make in life unaided. But her ambition, or rather her perception of what she desired for them, did not stop here. There were present demands which must be neglected solely because of her straitened circumstances; and she beheld ahead a long and widening vista of privileges from which, perforce, they would be debarred during the formative years for a similar reason. Henrietta's teeth were disconcertingly crooked, and should have the continuous attention of a skil-

ful dentist, and her voice had already that nasal twang which, if unchecked, is sure to result in feminine inelegance of speech. She wished that both the children, especially the girl, might have thorough instruction in French and music, and be sent to dancing school. Little Emil was giving signs of marked talent for drawing, and the thought of how that gift could be developed, was already causing her concern. It was obvious to her that each of the next ten years had more insistent instances in store for her. She knew that she could give her children what the democratic world delights to call a solid foundation, but she was eager to equip them with stimulating mental ideals and bodily graces, to put them within reach of excellence and culture.

She was too grateful to repine or to allow this shadow to oppress her spirit. Its sole effect was to stimulate her energies, to make her fertile in resources to counteract this disability, and painstaking in attention to her duties in the hope of a small increase in salary. She kept a close watch on Henrietta's voice, and put her on her own guard against its piercing quality; she organized a small dancing class from among the children in Lincoln Chambers for one evening in the week, and from her own past experience essayed their instruction in waltzing and social decorum. Also, on Sunday afternoons, she would often lure Emil and Henrietta to the new Art Museum and give them the opportunity which her own youth had lacked to discern artistic form and color, and to acquire inspiration from world-famous or exemplary paintings and sculpture. Then there sud-

denly came to her as treasure-trove a new fund to be drawn on for such purposes. Her employer, scanning the field of philanthropy by the light of his own professional experience, had realized that there was need in Benham of a legal aid society—that is, of an organization which would defray the charges of a firm of attorneys to whom people in utter distress, without means, and with petty but desperate grievances in which busy lawyers could not afford to interest themselves, could apply for succor. When it appeared that the clerical duties incident to the fund collected for this charity must be performed by some suitable person, it occurred to Gordon Perry—he had been seeking some such occasion—that Mrs. Stuart would make an admirable secretary and treasurer, especially as he intended that the society should pay two hundred dollars for the annual service. Constance's heart throbbed with delight at the announcement, and the first fifty dollars was devoted by her to the treatment of Henrietta's irregular front teeth. Would she be able some day to send Emil to college? Might she hope that her daughter would grow to be thoroughly a lady, not merely a smart, self-sufficient woman, but a gracious, refined, exquisite spirit like Mrs. Randolph Wilson? In her outlook for her children's future, she had become aware that she had set up two individuals for emulation: the woman whose æsthetic Christianity had enriched her life, and the man whose unaffected intelligence and vigor offered to her daily observation an example of honorable modern living. To lift her own flesh and blood above the rut of mediocre aims and attainments was now

the ambition of her soul, and she was ready to strain every nerve to bring this to pass.

Her acquaintance with Mrs. Perry had ripened into intimacy. The old lady had taken a strong fancy to her, and the liking was cordially reciprocated. This meant increasing friendliness on both sides. Not infrequently, on her return from the office, Constance would find her in possession at Lincoln Chambers with the room warm, five o'clock tea ready, Henrietta in her lap and Emil beside her, listening to absorbing reading or stories, each of which had a pungent, personal flavor, with a not too obtrusive moral. On the other hand, Constance was asked to dine every now and then in the new house, and after dinner, sometimes it happened that they went to the theatre with Mr. Perry, or on evenings when he was busy, the two women would sit cosily with their work, and conversation never flagged. Women, when sympathetically attached to each other, seem to be inexhaustible reservoirs of speech, which flow with a bubbling copiousness bewildering to masculine ears. In their case, the hands of the clock set the only limit to their mutual enjoyment. The hour of departure brought the single uncomfortable moments of the evening for Constance—that is, for the first two evenings. Her apartment was a full mile distant, but her friends' house was not more than two hundred yards from a line of electric cars which passed within a block from her own door. Until Gordon Perry, who came out of his library to say good-night, announced his intention of accompanying her home, the idea had never occurred to her that it was

necessary, or that he would offer his escort. Yet such are the inconsistencies of the feminine mind that the moment he did so she became aware that, if he had not offered it, she would have felt a trifle hurt. At the same time she did not wish him to accompany her. It would be obviously a superfluous piece of politeness; there was no risk of any kind in going home in the cars alone. She told him this in a few words of clear remonstrance. But he smilingly put on his overcoat, said it was a beautiful moonlight night, and assured her that he was anxious for a walk before going to bed. The idea of his walking only made the situation worse. Constance turned to his mother for support, but Mrs. Perry cordially seconded his assertion that it would do him good, so there was no escape from acceptance. The thought of having dragged a busy man—and her employer—out of his house at night disturbed her equanimity all the way home, so that although she delighted in having him as a companion in the exhilarating autumn air, under a glorious moon, she determined to prevent its recurrence. Yet, as she approached her destination, the fear of seeming ungracious supervened, and she had almost decided to postpone her protest until the next time, when he unwittingly gave her an opportunity to speak by remarking that he hoped that this was only one of many evenings which she would spend with them during the winter. "You must know," he added, "that my mother has taken a great fancy to you, and that it will not suit her at all if you are niggardly in your visits."

Constance smiled acquiescingly. "I love your

Constance would find her in possession at Lincoln Chambers

mother," she said, "and it will be a pleasure to me to come as often as she wishes." At the same instant she said to herself, "Now for it!" Whereupon she began sturdily, "Only, Mr. Perry——"

Why did she pause? She was at a loss to know. It was the reverse of her custom to begin a sentence and leave it dangling in this unfinished manner. She accused herself of being a goose, and, simultaneously she took a new breath to go on, only to be met by her companion's blithe sally:

"Only what, Mrs Stuart?" She could see that his eyes were laughing. Did he divine what was choking her?

"Only this: if I come to your mother, you must let me go home by myself. The electric cars are a stone's throw from your house, and run close to mine, so there is not the slightest necessity for your incommoding yourself." She paused, troubled. The last turn of the sentence, though it expressed her meaning, had not the felicitous sound she desired.

"I came because I knew it would give me pleasure," he answered, quickly, still with a laughing light in his eyes, under which she let her own fall quite unnecessarily, as it seemed to her. She was provoked with herself. The dialogue had acquired the aspect of social give and take, which was entirely remote from her intention.

"I have enjoyed it, too." She felt that this was the least she could say. "But there is no need; besides, Mr. Perry, you are my employer, and—and—" (she was halting again, but she bit her lip and plunged forward, seeking only to make herself clear) "that does make a difference—it

should make a difference. If I were—if I were not your stenographer, I should probably go home in a carriage, but I can't afford one, and—and the cars are perfectly safe and comfortable. I am used to looking after myself."

Her cheeks were burning. She had said what she meant to say, but it sounded crude and almost harsh. She wondered now why it had seemed necessary to her to make such a pother. As no immediate answer came from Mr. Perry, she stole a glance at his face. It had grown almost grave, and there was a different light in his eyes—a curious expression which puzzled her. "I hope you understand," she said, "and that I do not seem ungracious."

"I understand perfectly. I was admiring your sense—your sanity. Such things do make a difference—must make a difference, so long as human nature is constituted as it is; but every woman has not the hardihood to accept the limitations of her social lot. As you say, you are used to looking after yourself. I should not have been guilty of a breach of manners, had I allowed you to go home in a car as you came—put you into one, perhaps, at the street corner, if I were not occupied. That would have been the natural course under all the circumstances, although it might have been equally natural to treat another woman with more ceremony. I came with you to-night because it gave me pleasure, as I told you, and because I wished you to understand that the relations between us are not those of employer and employee, but social in every sense. You are my mother's friend and mine."

Constance's nerves tingled pleasantly at the apostrophe. "You are very good. You have always been kindness itself to me. I have felt that you both were my friends." She put out her hand shyly and gratefully to bid him good-night, and at the same time to indicate the warmth in her heart. "But now that I do understand," she added, "you must be sensible, too, and realize that I do not need an escort." She was rather appalled by her own boldness. His plea had only strengthened her feeling that his politeness was superfluous.

"Do you forbid it?" he asked, with an inflection of gayety.

She could not help smiling. "I cannot do that, you know. But if you wish to make me feel entirely at home, you will limit yourself at most to seeing me safely on a car at your street corner." She felt that she had touched firmer ground—that she was making her claim as a friend of the family, not being forced against her will into the pose of a coquette.

"A compromise!" he ejaculated. "And what a one-sided one."

"Life is made up of compromises, is it not? I thought I was being very generous."

There was a gentle, plaintive cadence to her words which both charmed his ear and touched his sensibilities. Was she about to strike her flag in the last ditch out of sheer weariness at his bravado?

"My only wish would be to please you," he said with sudden earnestness.

Constance looked at him wonderingly, a little

appalled at the change in his manner and speech. What had called forth their intensity? She became conscious that the blood was rising to her cheeks again, and that she had lost her composure a second time. For an instant Gordon gazed at her eagerly, as though he enjoyed her bewilderment, then with a return of gayety, he exclaimed:

"But I promise nothing—nothing."

He raised his hat and Constance, who had already entered the vestibule of her apartment-house, stood irresolute before ascending the stairs as one in a trance. She was displeased with herself; for the first time in her life it had seemed to her that her tongue and her wits were not under the control of her will. Presently she reflected that she might be working too hard and was run down, which on the whole, was comforting, until she looked in her mirror and saw there the refutation of this theory in her own hue of health. No, it could not be this, for there was no blinking the fact that she had improved notably in her appearance of late, which was comforting in a different way. She was so struck by the fact that she stood for a moment surveying her face and figure with contemplative surprise. But why had Mr. Perry been so queer? She asked herself that question more than once before she fell asleep, and in the morning ascribed it to her own social inaptness.

The next occasion when she spent the evening with Mrs. Perry was a fortnight later. When she was ready to go home Gordon put on his overcoat without a word and confronted her tantalizingly. She was conscious of a little disappointment, for, in spite of his declaration of independ-

ence, she had believed that he would not persist, but as he opened the front door she heard the welcome words:

"To-night I am going to comply with your wish by putting you on a car at the next corner."

"Thank you, very much." She forebore to add what was in her mind, that it was the only sensible way. But her little triumph gave elasticity to her steps.

For the first few moments the night seemed to set a seal upon his lips as he walked beside her, so that his response had the effect of being pondered. "My desire is to please you. But I shall reserve the right of pleasing myself now and then as I did the other day."

"It pleased me, too," Constance said, amiably. "What I feared was that it might become a custom—an unnecessary burden."

Gordon signalled an approaching car. "A burden? Mrs. Stuart, the burden of walking home by moonlight with the wrong woman is one which men generally manage to shift."

Constance laughed. "Perhaps I should have thought of that. But now you will be protected at all events."

From her seat in the electric car she beheld him standing at the street corner until his figure was lost in the shadows of the night. She felt complacent. She had gained her point, and since it was on terms need she feel otherwise than happy at the prospect of having him sometimes as a companion on her journeys home? The more she could see of him rightfully, without encroaching on his time, surely the better for her. The discretion

rested with him, not with her; she was simply the fortunate beneficiary.

So it came to pass that once in three or four times Gordon would exercise his privilege; and as another year slipped away and the spring brought milder nights and more inviting sidewalks, the occasions became more frequent, so that before either seemed to be aware of it, the custom of riding was more honored in the breach than the observance, and this without further discussion. They would simply start as though she were to take an electric car, and before reaching the corner he would casually interrupt their discourse to say, "It is a fine night; shall we walk?" to which Constance would reply, "If you like." After a while even this formula was dispensed with, and she was ready to take for granted that they both preferred the exercise. One day he asked permission to accompany her and her children on one of their Sunday afternoon strolls into the country, a proposal which startled her, but which she had no obvious excuse for refusing. On their return home from the excursion Henrietta and little Emil were so enthusiastic over this addition to the party that she felt reluctant on their account to prevent its repetition. So the experience was renewed every now and then, and, since he seemed to enjoy it, she accepted it as one of the pleasures which Providence had thrown in her way.

Intimacy naturally resulted from this increasing association. It was a constant comfort to Constance that Mr. Perry was such a natural person; that he obviously liked her for herself, but

did not affect to ignore or gloss over the fact that her life was circumscribed and straitened by her necessities; that, while assuming that she was interested in and able to appreciate the finer aspirations and concerns of existence, he let her perceive that he understood her predicament. Consequently she felt at liberty and encouraged to speak to him from time to time on the subject nearest her heart—the advancement of her children—and to ask advice in relation thereto.

On one of their evenings—a moonlight night, which rivalled in beauty that when he had first accompanied her—she had been consulting him as to the conditions of a free art school recently started in the new Art Museum, having little Emil in mind. After a short silence she suddenly said, "I admire your mother greatly, as you know. But sometimes I am doubtful whether she does not discourage me even more than she gives me hope; her example, I mean. She brought you up. She was almost as friendless as I. I dare say she did not have so many friends. Yet—yet you are you. She managed to give you everything."

"God bless her, yes, brave heart that she is."

"But——"

He cut her pensive conjunctive short. "I can guess what you are going to say. Excuse me; go on."

"I cannot give my children everything. But everything, then, would not be everything now."

"I divined your thought." The sympathy radiating from his sturdy tone brought a pleasant light to her eyes.

"Yet you are you," she reasserted.

He laughed. "Logician and flatterer! But you are right. My mother would have had a far harder struggle had she begun to-day. She might not have been able to give me everything, for everything then was not everything now, as you have said."

"Yet you have everything," she persisted, doughtily.

"Even if that were true, it would not signify. You are facing a condition, not a theory. Flour and sugar and standard oil may be cheaper to-day, but the demands of civilization on the individual are so much greater—of civilization everywhere, but especially in this country, where the growth of prosperity has been so prodigious and the stress of competition has become so fierce."

"Oh, yes; oh, yes. You understand," she said, eagerly. "There are so many things which I should like to give my children which I cannot—which I know are beyond my reach, but which would be of infinite service to them in the struggle to make the most of life. You spoke to me once of the limitation of my social lot. That is nothing. What is hard for a mother to bear is the consciousness that her children will fall short of what she would wish them to become because she has not the power to secure for them the best. Yet it must be borne, and borne bravely."

"Yes, it is lamentably hard. The chief blot on the triumph of individualism—on the American principle of the development of self—is that the choicest privileges of civilization should hang beyond the reach of those who are handicapped merely because they are handicapped. The de-

struction of the poor is their poverty, as my old school-master used to state, though I didn't know then what he meant. And it must be borne, as you say. Even here, where everything is possible to the individual, renunciation still stares the majority in the face as the inexorable virtue."

"Surely," she answered, with simple pathos. "Thank you for understanding me. I knew you would. If I struggle, it is because I am so ambitious for my children to rise. I would not have them remain mere hewers of wood and drawers of water—one of the majority you speak of—as I have been."

He turned his face toward her. "You are far more than that; you are a sweet woman. You must not underestimate character in your recognition of the power of things. You can give your children that, and it is no cant to say that character remains everlastingly the backbone of human progress."

"Things!" she echoed, ignoring apparently both the tribute and the consolation proffered. "That is the word." She hugged her thought in silence for a moment as though fascinated. "When I was a girl there were no things to speak of; now—" she paused and sighed; evidently the vision which her spirit entertained disconcerted her powers of speech. "It is not that I wish my children to be rich—merely rich, Mr. Perry. You know that. It is that I wish them to be able to appreciate, to feel, to enjoy what is best in life. You spoke of the power of character just now. There is Mrs. Randolph Wilson. She has all the

virtues of plain character and so much more besides. Compare her with a woman like me."

"Mrs Randolph Wilson!" His tone revealed his surprise at the antithesis. "I see. I see," he repeated, interested by the completeness of the contrast.

"I owe so much to her," Constance murmured. "Before I knew her my outlook was so narrow and colorless. She has taught me to enrich my life, poor as it still is."

"She is a fine woman. And yet, in my opinion, you need not fear comparison with Mrs. Wilson."

"Oh, Mr. Perry!" She stopped short for an instant in recoil. The protesting astonishment of her exclamation showed him not only that he had violated a temple by his words, but that, as a consequence, she believed him insincere, which in her eyes would be a more grievous fault.

"It is quite true," he said with decision. "You are very different; but it is quite true. Your outlook was narrow, perhaps, but it was clear and straight."

"Oh, no. You do not know her, then, nor me. I tried to see clearly according to my lights, but that is just it—my lights were defective, and I saw only half the truth until she revealed it to me."

"Mrs. Wilson has had great opportunities."

"Yes, indeed. And she has taken advantage of them. Great opportunities!" she repeated with an exultant sigh. "They are what I had in mind a few minutes ago; not for myself, you know, but for my children. I envy—yes, I envy opportunities for them." Her voice had a quiver as though

she were daring a confession to the sphinx-like stars.

She had changed the emphasis of the dialogue, but Gordon pursued his tenor. "Her daughter has had every opportunity, yet her mother can scarcely regard her with pride."

"I barely know Mrs. Waldo. It was just before her wedding that her mother was so kind to to me. I saw her once or twice at the house, but only for a moment."

"At least she has made a mess of her marriage."

Constance started. "It is true, then, what was in the newspapers?"

"It is true that she and her husband have agreed to separate. It is an open secret that she has gone to Sioux Falls in order to obtain a divorce on a colorless ground in the shortest possible time. They will both be free in less than a year."

"How terrible! Loretta Davis read me a paragraph last week to the effect that Mr. and Mrs. Waldo were not happy. I set it down as baseless gossip. It seemed to me impossible that Mrs. Wilson's daughter— Ah, I am so sorry for Mrs. Wilson."

"She was in the office last week."

"I remember."

"She came to consult me; to see if anything could be done. She has reasoned with her daughter—used every argument in her arsenal—but without avail. Mrs. Waldo's one idea is to be free. And yet she has had every opportunity."

"But that proves nothing, Mr. Perry, surely." They had reached the threshold of Lincoln Cham-

bers. There was the courage of conviction in the frank gaze she bent on him.

"Only that the power to have everything may numb the spirit and make individual self-will the sole arbiter of conduct."

"Agreed. But there can be no doubt that civilization offers us more to-day than it ever did, if we can only be put within reach of it. The thought sometimes haunts me that I may die and Henrietta grow up to be like—like Loretta Davis; never know what life may mean, because she has not had the chance."

He looked at her admiringly. "I am more than half teasing you," he said. "While it is true that the general standard of living is higher than ever before, it remains true as ever that only the attuned spirit can grasp and utilize the best. To argue otherwise would be cant."

"So it seems to me," she said, with her air of direct simplicity.

"As for this tragedy—for it is a tragedy almost Sophoclean in its scope, as you will presently learn, my lips are sealed for the moment beyond what I have told you. But you are right in your enthusiasm for Mrs. Wilson. She is in touch with the temper of the world's progress—according to her lights."

She smiled faintly. "I still wish I were more like her."

Gordon seemed for a moment to be pondering this assertion, then fixing her with his eyes, said: "I believe you have never heard anything from your husband since he deserted you?"

"Nothing."

"You do not know his whereabouts, nor whether he is alive or dead?"

She shook her head.

"More than three years have elapsed. So you are entitled to a divorce in this State, if you see fit to claim it."

Constance had listened in astonishment. His tone was so respectful that she could not take offence. He seemed to be merely informing her as to her rights; and though the topic had never been broached up to this time between them, was he not her intimate friend? Nevertheless she felt agitated.

"It has never occurred to me that a divorce would be desirable," she answered with as much formality as her dislike of artifice allowed her to adopt. Then, yielding to curiosity or the inclination to break another lance with him, she added: "Of what benefit would it be to me to seek a divorce?"

"Merely that the bond is already broken; what remains is a husk."

"My husband may return." The response struck her as futile; still it had risen to her lips as a convenient possibility.

"That is true. But if he did return after what has happened, I should think—I have no right to invade your privacy—" He stopped short, evidently appalled by the sound of his own presumption.

There was a brief silence. It would have been easy for Constance to leave his inquiry where he had left it, but her love for the truth caused her first to face the issue thus presented, and having

solved it by one full glance, to bear testimony to what was in her heart. Why she felt this frankness necessary, she did not know, unless it were that he was such a friend she did not wish him to think he had offended. The interval was only momentary, but she appeared to herself to have been standing speechless in the presence of the ashes of her past for an awkward period before she said:

"My husband said when he went away that we could never be happy together. I do not wish him to return."

She realized she was telling him her love was dead. It was the truth; why should he not know? She heard him draw a deep breath. Suddenly remembering the argument which had provoked his question, her mind flew to it for refuge and sheltered itself behind it as a bulwark.

"But that is no reason why I should seek a divorce. A divorce could not alter the situation."

He hesitated a moment as though he were about to continue the discussion, then evidently thought better of it. "I simply wished you to know your rights. Good-night."

XVII

AS she reached the landing upon which her own apartment opened, Constance noticed that there was a light in Loretta Davis's room. Loretta was now a full-fledged nurse. That is, she had completed her course at the hospital, and was taking cases of her own. She had already obtained two or three through the patronage of Mrs. Wilson, but she happened to be out of work at the moment. It occurred to Constance that she would impart her information to her neighbor. Loretta was deeply interested in everything which concerned their benefactress. Loretta had seen what was in the newspapers, and, since it was true, why should not she know? This was a plausible excuse for gratifying that strong desire to share her knowledge which assails every woman who has something to tell. Had it been a real secret, Constance would have been adamant. As it was, she did not appreciate until too late that this was just the sort of subject which she and Loretta could not discuss sympathetically. She was sorry for her; she did her best to befriend and encourage her, and tried to like her; but though they got on pleasantly, their point of view was apt to be radically different.

Loretta opened the door. "Oh, it's you, Constance. I'd made up my mind that someone had sent for me."

"I'm sorry to disappoint you, Loretta. But I've something to tell you—something you'll be distressed to hear. What you read in the newspaper about Mrs. Wilson's daughter—the Waldos—is true."

Then she repeated briefly what she knew, omitting reference to Mrs. Wilson's visit to the office. Loretta listened with parted lips and an expression in her usually matter-of-fact face curiously compounded of solicitude and knowingness, as though commiseration and the glamor of the scandal were contending forces.

"I knew it was true; the newspapers wouldn't have printed it unless there'd been something in it. My! but she'll feel bad, won't she?"

"It will wound her terribly."

"How did your boss find out?"

Constance winced. Somehow the epithet jarred worse than usual, and she felt that she could not stand it. The experiences of the evening were on her nerves, though sympathy for Mrs. Wilson had thrust her personal emotions to the back of her mind for more leisurely inspection.

"You mustn't call him that, Loretta. It doesn't express him at all."

Loretta looked surprised and laughed. "What's the matter? He is your boss, isn't he?" she asserted. "Oh, well—your employer, Mr. Gordon Perry, Esq., counsellor-at-law, if that'll suit you. My! but you're getting red."

Constance was annoyed with herself for having protested. Indeed, she was biting her tongue for having brought on the interview. Now that she had told the facts she shrank from further dis-

cussion. Yet it was patent that Loretta had every intention of discussing the episode with her.

"There's no doubt about the truth of the matter, unfortunately," she said, by way of answer to the original question.

Loretta's large eyes began to rove. Then they suddenly fixed Constance with the gleam of a transporting idea.

"I'm going to see her, right off—to-morrow, I mean," she added, noting the swift, barometric sign of disapproval which her words evoked, though it was no more than a contraction of the eyelids. But, suspicious as she was, she assumed that the only criticism had been that she was going forthwith.

From the moment Gordon Perry had spoken, Constance had been yearning to hasten to Mrs. Wilson's side and offer the sympathy which she felt. This had been her first impulse too, but a moment's reflection had proved to her that to do so was out of the question; that it would be an intrusion—a violation of that subtle code of nicety which governed her benefactress's life. Mrs. Wilson was the last woman to betray to the every-day world that she was sorely wounded. Was not endurance of suffering without plaint and with an unruffled countenance one of the tenets of her friend's æsthetic creed? So what right had a person like herself to invade her privacy? No, she must remain dumb until Mrs. Wilson gave her the opportunity to speak or publicity offered an excuse for flowers or some token of affection. Thus she had reasoned, and hence her involuntary challenge to Loretta's confident announcement.

"She'll expect me to be sorry for her, and I am," pursued Loretta, complacent over her project. "I'll ask her all about it. Won't it make a stir in the newspapers! There'll be a new picture of her, sure." Thus reminded, she opened a table drawer and produced a large scrap-book, which she exhibited to Constance with an air of satisfaction. It was made up of newspaper illustrations and clippings relative to the object of adoration—pictures of Mrs. Wilson in a variety of poses, of her house, of her equipages, and of everything which the reportorial artist had been able to reproduce; also scores of allusions to her in print culled from the social columns. It was a current, but a thorough collection, for Loretta had purchased back issues in order to possess the newspaper features of the wedding ceremonies. It was to these she now turned, staying her hand at a page where the bride and her mother looked forth, ranged side by side in festal attire. Loretta surveyed them contemplatively. "I never laid eyes on the daughter. They're not much alike, are they? Perhaps she'll be at home when I go. I'd give anything to see her."

The scrap-book was not new to Constance, but it had been considerably amplified since she had seen it last. She had never been able to understand why Loretta had undertaken or prized it. Nevertheless, it was a symptom of hero-worship in line with collections of the photographs of adored actors by matinée girls, and was not to be despised too heartily if she wished to remain sympathetic. But just now Constance's mind was otherwise busy. She, too, adored Mrs. Wilson,

and she painfully depicted to herself the annoyance which this visit with its threatened frankness would cause her divinity.

"Don't you think, Loretta, that it would be better to wait a little before you call?" she said, in gentle appeal.

"Better? Why better?"

"More appropriate. Mrs. Wilson will not feel like discussing the matter just yet. If her daughter is with her, so much the more reason. She must be very unhappy, and, if either of us were to visit her now to offer sympathy, I'm sure she would regard it as an intrusion."

Loretta bridled. "If I were unhappy, she'd come to see me. If my baby were to die, wouldn't she come gliding down here to make me feel resigned? Two can play at that game. She's been nice to me; why shouldn't I let her know that I'm sorry for her? Besides," she added, with a shrug of her shoulders and a bold look, "I'd like to see how she'd behave—how she'd take it. I want to see the house again, too."

Appalled as Constance was, she said to herself that she must not let the shock of this lack of taste palsy her own effectiveness. To upbraid Loretta would only confirm her in her intention.

"Let us hope that there will be no publicity; that the matter will be kept very quiet. If Mrs. Wilson is desirous of concealing it, surely she would not be pleased to know that we had heard of it. I told you because I know how fond you are of her, and that her secret would be safe in your hands."

"Publicity? Of course there'll be publicity."

The suggestion of concealment was obviously distasteful to her. "Why, I read it to you in the newspaper. The reporters are certain to get wind of it in a few days, see if they don't. And when they do, look out for head-lines and half-page illustrations. The public have a right to know what's going on, haven't they?" she asked in the assertive tone of one vindicating a vested privilege.

"Not things of this kind—private concerns, surely." Constance sighed, realizing that it was only too probable that the newspapers, alert as bloodhounds for the trail of a new social scandal, would come upon this shortly and blazon it to the world.

"Private concerns! Suppose a multi-millionaire's daughter tires of her husband and runs away to South Dakota to get a divorce as quick as the law allows, do you call that a private concern? I guess not, Constance. The public—meaning such as you and me—naturally take an interest, and object to its being hushed up. The multi-millionaires have the money; we have the newspapers. We don't get any too much that's interesting in our lives."

"We don't know any of the facts; we mustn't prejudge Mrs. Waldo until we hear what they are," said Constance, ignoring the philosophy of this tirade in her dismay at the assumption.

"That's why I'm going to see her. I want to find out the facts," said Loretta, triumphantly. "I was only supposing. Like as not her daughter has been ill-treated, and is running away because she has to. If so, there's not much to worry about.

She'll get her divorce, and be able to marry again as soon as she has the chance."

"But even so, Loretta, her mother must necessarily regard it as a family misfortune, which she would not like to talk about. As to marrying again, that would only make the matter worse for Mrs. Wilson."

"Worse? Why worse?"

"It would distress her, I'm certain. It would be contrary to her ideas of the eternal fitness of things."

Constance recognized her own sententiousness, which was due to the perception that she had allowed herself to speak by the card without sufficient authority. She had never discussed the subject or anything analogous to it with Mrs. Wilson, and to put arguments in her mouth would be surely a liberty. Yet her heart told her that the conclusion which she had uttered, both in its substance and phraseology, stated correctly Mrs. Wilson's position. What suddenly interested her was the wonder whether it expressed her own convictions.

Loretta lost no time in bringing this to an issue. "Supposing Mrs. Waldo has been miserable and without fault, do you mean to tell me she'd object to her daughter marrying the right man if he came along? Why, wouldn't *you* be glad, after all you've been through, if the right person came along—some decent man with a little money who could look after your children?"

"I?" To the ears of Constance the sound of her own voice resembled a wail. Why should Loretta be so unfeeling as to make her personal experiences the test of such a text?

"Yes, you."

Constance gathered her forces for a display of proper dignity. She wished to be kind still, but conclusive.

"Mine is not a case at all in point. I am not divorced from my husband."

Loretta plainly regarded this argument as flimsy, for she snapped her fingers. "Pooh!" she said. "You could get a divorce any day you like." She stared at Constance a moment, then rose from her chair, planted her palms on the table and bent forward by way of emphasis with an air both determined and a little diabolical.

"Supposing your—your employer, Gordon Perry, Esq., counsellor-at-law, was to make you an offer of his hand and heart to-morrow, do you mean to tell me, Constance Stuart, that you wouldn't snap him up in a jiffy?"

"It isn't a supposable case," replied poor Constance. One can slam a door in an intruder's face; there is no such buffer for impertinent speeches.

"But supposing costs nothing. Of course it's supposable, why not? You're the sort of woman who's twice as good looking now that you've filled out as you were at nineteen. You know well enough you're growing handsomer and more fetching every day. Only a blind man couldn't see that."

"That would have nothing to do with it even if it were true."

"You may bet a man like that wouldn't marry you if you were plain. But just supposing? I do believe you're getting red again."

The victim, conscious of the fact, sought relief

in merriment. She jumped at the impulse to treat this indelicate effrontery jocosely as the only possible attitude. "It's because you're so absurd, Loretta. But since you seem to wish an answer to your ridiculous question——"

The sharp note of the electric bell broke in upon the slight pause which she made to weigh her words.

"Someone for me!" cried Loretta, and she ran to the tube. But she looked over her shoulder to say "Continued in our next! The offer is good for a week."

Constance felt the inclination to throw the scrapbook at her head. The next moment she was vexed with herself for allowing her equanimity to be disturbed, and began to rehabilitate the interrupted sentence. What had she been going to say? It dawned upon her that, curiously enough, she had not formulated the conclusion. Meantime Loretta was going through the functions of whistling down the tube and receiving the message. The surprising import of her next words roused Constance from a brown study.

"Talk of the devil! It's a messenger from Mr. Perry's. Somebody's ill and I'm wanted. The boy's coming up."

Somebody ill! It must be Mrs. Perry. The few moments of suspense which elapsed before the district messenger-boy arrived seemed interminable to Constance. Loretta had opened the door and the tramp of his ascent sounded leisurely. When he appeared he thrust his hand into his breast-pocket and produced a letter.

"It's for Mrs. Stuart," he said, guardedly.

"I'm Mrs. Stuart," said Constance.

"I was told to ring at your bell first, and if you was asleep or didn't answer the tube to try the other lady."

Constance read the brief contents of the note with perturbation. It was from Mr. Perry, informing her that on his return home he had found his mother stricken with paralysis, that the doctor was in attendance, and that a trained nurse was necessary. He had thought of Loretta; would Constance send her if disengaged?

"Oh, Loretta, dear Mrs. Perry is seriously ill—a stroke of paralysis. Mr. Perry asks you to come to her at once."

"I'll be ready to start in a few minutes," answered Loretta, briskly.

"We will both go," added Constance, as though to herself. "There may be something I can do." She turned to the messenger: "Return as quickly as you can, and tell the gentleman that we—wait a moment." She tore the sheet of note-paper apart and seating herself at the table wrote hastily on the blank half in pencil: "Loretta will come at once, and I shall accompany her. My heart grieves for you, my dear friend." She folded it and bent down one corner. "Give him this," she said, "and please make haste."

At this time in Benham the doctrine that sewage must be diverted from the sources of water supply used for drinking purposes was firmly established, and the doctrine that not every woman able to read and write is qualified to teach school was being gradually, if grudgingly, admitted to be not altogether un-American. So swift had been the change

of attitude toward special knowledge that there had even been a revolution in regard to the theory advocated by the original board of trustees of the Silas S. Parsons Free Hospital that every woman is a born nurse, and is competent, after a fortnight's training at the utmost, to take charge of the sickest patients. Those familiar with affairs in Benham will recall that the original ruling spirit of that institution was Mrs. Selma Lyons, wife of United States Senator Lyons. She disapproved of special training and was a strong champion of the principle that an American woman with aspirations is more likely to be fettered than helped by conventional standards, and that individuality should be given free play in order to attain brilliant results. Yet though this principle was reverenced at first in the employment of nurses for the hospital, progress, that stern derider even of the American woman, gradually set it at naught during the period when Mrs. Lyons was resident in Washington and unable to give that close personal attention to the affairs of the institution which she desired. It so happened that after her husband's defeat at the end of his first term through the hostility of Horace Elton, one of the financial magnates of that section of the country, who harbored a grudge against him for alleged duplicity when Governor, the President of the United States threw a sop to the defeated candidate in the form of the Spanish mission. Selma, who was still engaged in the effort to chastise her enemies and to reëstablish what she regarded as true American social principles, was sorry to leave Washington, but she found some consolation in the thought of

introducing American ethical standards at a foreign court, especially of dealing a death-blow to bull-fights by her personal influence. She was obliged, however, to relax considerably her vigilance in regard to the hospital; even to consent to an enlargement of the board of trustees. This in its new form presently adopted what the members regarded as modern methods. Mrs. Wilson had been one of the recent additions to the body. Yet, under her regimen, though every applicant for a nurse's diploma was obliged to serve a rigorous apprenticeship of two years at the hospital, the idea of scrutinizing the antecedents and previous education of the young women offering themselves was still novel. Selma would have regarded an inquiry of this kind as aristocratic and hostile to the free development of the individual. Now—but a few years later—such a system of scrutiny is in vogue in Benham; but at the date of Loretta Davis's admittance to the Silas S. Parsons Free Hospital, though it doubtless occurred to Mrs. Wilson that her candidate was not ideal, she had not demurred. On the contrary, she had welcomed the opportunity of giving the girl a chance to redeem herself in this field of usefulness.

Similarly, though Constance might not have picked out her neighbor for this particular service, she felt only thankfulness that Loretta was disengaged, and that they were able to betake themselves at once to Mrs. Perry's bedside. The old dame employed to look after the baby in Loretta's absence was still available. Constance waked her, and requested her to keep an eye on her own children in case she were away all night. After their

arrival at their destination, however, it was soon clear to Constance that there was nothing she could do. Mrs. Perry had not regained consciousness, and the physician in attendance was non-committal as to the outcome. So Gordon informed them briefly, and Constance was left in the library to her own reflections while he showed Loretta to her post. She was not sorry that she had come; but much as she wished to remain, plainly she would be in the way. Loretta was trained, and was the proper person to be in the sick-room. Yet she would not go until Mr. Perry returned. He might have instructions for the morrow concerning the changes in his plans consequent upon his mother's illness. Besides, she wished to express more specifically her desire to be of any possible service.

Gordon returned before long. He put out his hand as though they had not met already. "I thank you heartily for your message of sympathy," he said.

"There is no change?"

"None. It is the beginning of the end."

"Yet——"

"Oh, yes, she may recover, thanks to the tireless methods of modern science; but what would the only possible recovery mean to a woman like her? Merely durance vile. No—one's natural impulse, of course, is to hold on to one we love—to delay the parting at any price. The doctors must have their way. But when I allow myself to think, I know it would be best for her not to wake again. She would prefer it. You know that."

"Yes, she would prefer it," Constance murmured. "I must not keep you from her," she added.

"Please stay a little. I can do nothing. It hurts me to see her so unlike herself, though the doctor says she is not suffering." He glanced at the clock apprehensively. "It is getting late, I know; but you must not go quite yet. I will telephone for a carriage presently. I must give you directions as to what to do at the office to-morrow in case I should not be there." Then, as though he divined what was in her thoughts, he said, "I was glad when I knew you were coming. I said to myself, 'if my mother should recover consciousness, the sight of Constance at her bedside would do her more good than any medicine.' "

He had never before employed her Christian name in her presence. The use of it now seemed to her to put a seal upon the bond of their friendship. He was become, indeed, a wise older brother whom it delighted her to serve.

"But you will come to-morrow?" he said.

"If I may. I should like to be near her. I hate to feel helpless where she is concerned."

"We are both helpless. What a mother she has been to me! I owe everything to her. Truth has been her divinity, truth—truth—and she has had the courage to live up to what she believed." He paused. Evidently his spirit quailed before the impending future. "And now she is slipping away from me. The common destiny. But she is my mother. I wonder where she is going—what is to become of all that energy and clear-headedness. Modern science tells us that force never perishes.

It is as difficult to imagine my mother's individuality at an end as it is to convince one's self in the presence of death that the grave is not master." He sighed and turned to hide a tear.

"I know not where His islands lift
Their fronded palms in air,
I only know I cannot drift
Beyond His love and care."

The lines rose to Constance's lips and she repeated them. They were not symbolic of her church; rather they were a text from the universal hope of mankind. She felt instinctively that any more orthodox definition would have jarred upon him.

"Thank you," he said, softly. "It is so easy in this age of conscientious investigation to reject everything which will not bear the test of human reason. Death is no greater a mystery than birth. We know not whence we came, nor whither we go. But when the world ceases to believe that there is some answer to it all worthy of our aspirations, it will be time for this planet to become a frozen pole again. You women are apt to bear that in mind more faithfully than we," he added, lifting his eyes to hers. "Come," he said, "we must not forget to-morrow; you have work to do. I must not be selfish."

A few minutes later he put her in a carriage. In the morning Constance, imbued with his speech, half hoped that she might hear that Mrs. Perry was dead. But Gordon appeared at the office about ten o'clock, announcing that the night had

brought a change for the better. His mother had smiled at him recognizingly, and faintly pressed his hand. Though she was unable to speak, the doctor had encouraged him to believe that she would do so. Constance perceived that he was in better spirits, showing that, despite his words, he was rejoicing that the parting had been delayed.

The improvement in Mrs. Perry's condition continued for nearly three weeks. One side of her body was completely paralyzed, but she regained presently the power to utter a few occasional words, though her enunciation was difficult to understand. At the end of the fourth day from her seizure she was permitted to see Constance for a few minutes. Soon after daily visits increasing gradually in length were sanctioned, and Constance, after her duties at the office were over, was enabled to spend an hour or more at the bedside of her friend before returning to her own home. This was an agreeable arrangement to Loretta, for it gave that young woman a breathing spell—the opportunity to take the fresh air or to do whatever she pleased. Mrs. Perry evidently delighted in Constance's attendance. She listened to reading with satisfaction for a time, but later it seemed to suit her better to lie quietly, her unmaimed hand resting in or near one of Constance's, while the latter now and then broke the twilight silence by recounting the news of the day. "I like the sound of your voice, my dear," she said to Constance. "It is refreshing and musical as a brook." Occasionally Gordon joined them, but he would never permit Constance to relinquish her seat beside the bed in his favor.

"My turn comes later," he said. "I tuck my mother up for the night."

Mrs. Perry seemed to enjoy especially the days when they were there together. She would turn her eyes from one to the other as though she delighted in them equally. But only once did she make any reference to what may have been in her thoughts concerning their joint presence. It was in the third week of her illness, and what she said was spoken low to Constance, though evidently intended to be audible to them both.

"You must take good care of him, dear, when I am gone."

It was one of her best days as regards articulation, so there was no room for misunderstanding. The words were harmless enough and Constance took them in the only sense in which they were applicable.

"I shall stay with him as long as he will keep me, you may rely on that, Mrs. Perry," she responded, brightly.

A pleasant smile came over the old lady's face and she looked in the direction of her son. Her mouth twitched. "Do you hear what she says, Gordon?" There was a humorous twinkle in her voice, which doubtless was not lost on him. His back was to the light, so that he had the advantage of shadow to cover his mental processes.

"I regard it as impossible that Constance and I should ever drift apart," he said.

His sphinx-like reply seemed to be reassuring to the invalid. She lay like one serenely satisfied, and did not pursue the subject further. As for Constance, she noticed the use by Mr. Perry of

her Christian name again, but it seemed to her only fitting and friendly. She did not need his assurance to feel that they were not likely to drift apart, but it was delightful to hear it from his lips.

When Mrs. Perry's seeming convalescence had reached a stage at which the doctor was on the point of sending her out to drive, a second attack of her malady occurred and brought the end. She became unconscious at once, and passed away within a few hours. On the afternoon after the funeral Constance returned to the house with Loretta in order that the latter might collect and bring away her belongings. Gordon was closeted in his library alone with his sorrow, and the two women moving noiselessly through the silent house made but a brief stay. While they were on their way to Lincoln Chambers a newsboy entered the street-car crying the evening papers. Loretta having bought one made an ejaculation. Absorbed in what she had discovered, she paid no heed at first to Constance's glance of interrogation, but read with an avidity which seemed breathless. Then she thrust the sheet under her companion's eyes, and pointing to a column bristling with large headlines, exclaimed:

"Here it is at last; a full account of the divorce proceedings with their pictures, and a picture of her. It's a worse affair than anyone imagined. It says Paul Howard and his wife are mixed up in it, and there's something about a pistol going off at Newport. I haven't read it all yet. But look—look!"

Loretta's demeanor suggested not merely excitement, but a sort of saturnine glee, so that Con-

stance turned from the printed page toward her as though seeking to fathom its cause, then back to the newspaper, the capitals of which told their sensational story with flaring offensiveness.

"I won't read it now, Loretta. I'll wait until we get home. What a cruel shame it is that the press has got hold of it."

Loretta gave a questioning jerk to her shoulders. "I don't know about that. I knew she wouldn't be able to hush it up. How could she expect to? Besides—" She did not finish her sentence. Instead, she wagged her head, as one in possession of a secret and grinned knowingly. "I'll tell you something, some day. But not now —not now." Then she reassumed control of the newspaper, saying, "Well, if you don't care to read it, I do. There are three columns." She uttered the last words as though she were announcing treasure-trove.

But the ellipsis had left no doubt as to her attitude, which led Constance to remark on the spur of the moment, "Neither of us would like to have our misfortunes paraded before the world. I know what it means; how it cuts and stings."

Loretta looked up admiringly. "When your husband ran away?"

"Yes."

"And your picture appeared?"

"No, not that, thank heavens!"

Loretta laughed indulgently. "You're queer, Constance. You're so scared of publicity. I shouldn't mind a bit having my picture in the papers. What's more, I don't believe she does. This divorce had to come out, sooner or later. I

shouldn't wonder in the least," she added, boldly, "if she lets the reporters know when she has a new photograph taken. By the way, I went to see her."

Constance knew at once what she meant, and the dismay and curiosity inspired by the announcement rose paramount to her other feelings of protest.

"When?"

"It surprises you, doesn't it? I went on two of those afternoons when you sat with Mrs. Perry. And I saw her, too. The first time the butler said she was engaged. He tried to shunt me off the same way again, but I was too smart for him. 'Tell her Loretta Davis is very anxious to talk with her on business,' I said, and the message came back that she'd be down presently. Between my baby and my nurse's work it wasn't hard to find the business, and then I told her plump I was sorry to hear about her daughter. At that she colored up—you ought to have seen her, and looked as though she had swallowed a steel rod. Said she, 'I appreciate your desire to be sympathetic, Loretta, but that is a subject I cannot discuss with anyone, please.'" Loretta spoke mincingly, evidently aiming to reproduce Mrs. Wilson's exquisiteness of manner and speech. "Said I, 'I thought it might make you feel better to talk it over with someone. It would me, I know.' But it wasn't any use. She wouldn't, and she sort of froze me; and pretty soon we both got up, I to go, and she to have me go. However, now it's all out, and everyone will be talking about it."

"But not with her. I warned you that she wouldn't like it."

"Yes, you warned me. And I don't mind saying I think she needn't have been so stiff, seeing I told her everything when I was in trouble. Anyhow, I saw the house again and her, and now there's a new picture of her in the paper, and the thing is going to make a big sensation, if what's printed here is true, and I guess it is." She nodded her head with a repetition of her air of mystery. "There are the facts you said we ought to wait for."

"But you seem almost glad," Constance could not refrain from remarking. "You stated you went to see Mrs. Wilson because you were sorry for her."

"So I did; so I am. I'm dreadfully sorry for her. I'd do anything to help her, but I can't; and she won't let me show my sympathy. But since the thing has happened, I'm glad it's exciting."

Constance looked puzzled. "I don't think I understand."

"I enjoy sensations, and big head-lines. They tone me up. You're different, I guess." A sudden thought seemed to occur to her, for she regarded Constance for a moment as a doctor might look at a patient, then she thrust her hand into the pocket of her jacket and produced a small bottle which contained white tablets. "When I feel low in my mind—done up—I take one of these."

"What are they?"

"Something a friend of mine at the hospital recommended. They do the work." While delivering this not altogether candid response, Loretta unscrewed the stopper and emptying a tablet

on to her palm swallowed it, then offered the bottle to her companion. "Have one?"

Constance shook her head.

"Well, the next time you feel fagged, ask me for one." An instant later she sprang to her feet, exclaiming, "Why, here we are! We ought to get out."

It was even so. The interest of their conversation had been such that they had neglected to notice the flight of time or to observe where they were. As the car was virtually at the point where they wished it to stop, Loretta hurried toward the door, signalling to the conductor as she did so; but she failed to catch his eye, for he happened to be absorbed by an organ-grinder on the other side of the car from that on which they were to get off. The car was moving slowly, and, though she had her hand-bag, it was a simple matter to spring to the ground without further ado. She did so successfully, landing a few feet beyond the crossing. Constance, who was following close behind, heard the voice of the conductor, "Wait, lady, until the car stops," and the jingle of the bell, but she disdained to heed it. She jumped lightly, but somehow the heel of her boot caught on the edge of the platform or she slipped. At all events her impetus was thwarted, and instead of landing on her feet, she pitched forward, striking her forehead on the pavement.

XVIII

WHEN Constance came to herself she was in her own bed. It appeared that she had been carried insensible into a drug store, and thence to Lincoln Chambers, which were close at hand. A doctor presently restored her to consciousness, but he gave imperative instructions that she was to be kept absolutely quiet or he would not answer for the consequences of the nervous shock. It was the second day before her countenance expressed recognition of Mrs. Harrity, the pensioner who looked after the children, and who sat sewing at her bedside. Even then her senses shrank from every effort, and having learned by a question or two that she had fallen, and that the children were well, she lapsed into a comatose state. When she emerged from this she was very weak, but her mind was clear. She could not bear the light, however. Her eyes burned with a stinging pain whenever they encountered it, and she was forced to submit to the physician's orders that she remain in a dark room for a week.

Her first inquiry after her mind was able to focus itself was whether word had been sent to the office. She was told that Loretta had done this by telephone; that Mr. Perry had called promptly, and that the roses on the table were from him. Mrs. Harrity seemed proud of the visit and the gift.

"He told me to say you weren't to worry, and to take all the time you need to get well. He's a pleasant-spoken gentleman, Mrs. Stuart, and wanted to know everything the doctor had said."

Mrs. Harrity was proud also of the fact that Loretta had been summoned to attend a new patient. She was proudest of all of a piece of intelligence, or rather prophecy, which Loretta had let fall the day after the accident, which she hastened to impart to Constance the first moment the latter appeared able to take it in.

"She says as how you ought to get big damages from the railroad."

"But I'm not much hurt, am I?" asked Constance.

The dame perceived that she had not lived up to the doctor's orders. Yet now she could conscientiously relieve her patient's natural solicitude.

"Mercy, no. You've broken nothing. You're only shook up. And it hasn't hurt your good looks a mite. But," she added, still conscientious, "the doctor says it's your nerves, and nerves are most as good as bones before a jury, especially if one has a smart lawyer handy as you have."

Constance sat up in bed. Instead of being a comfort, as was intended, the broad hint distressed her.

"I don't wish any damages. It was my own fault. I jumped before the car stopped. It was very silly. I only want to get well."

The dread of a tedious convalescence was already haunting her reviving faculties. Her absence from the office would be very inconvenient to Mr. Perry, and confinement at home for more

than a few days would prove a disastrous inroad on her resources. She must hasten to recover.

Meantime Mrs. Harrity was looking blank at the reception accorded to what she had supposed would be a nerve tonic to the sufferer. She replied stanchly:

"She says different. She's ready to go on the stand and swear against the company. You're all right, darling. Smell them flowers, and lie down like a good girl. The doctor says you must keep still and not talk." So saying, she pushed a little nearer the vase of roses, one of which Constance had reached with her outstretched hand in the dark. Constance's impulse had been to detach it from its fellows so as to enjoy its fragrance at close range. But the larger opportunity afforded her, or else the jogging of her purpose, changed her mind. She bent forward and burying her face in the cool rose leaves inhaled their rich perfume.

"It was very kind of him to send them," she murmured, as though in monologue. Then appreciating for the first time her weakness she sank back upon her pillow. She said to herself that he was such a friend that he would make the best of her absence for a week and by the end of that time she would be herself again. But what a fool she had been to jump; to take such a risk, she a grown woman with children! She ought to have known better; she was getting middle-aged, and she must be more staid. Still it was some consolation to know she had not broken her nose.

A note received from Mr. Perry twenty-four hours later and read to her by her little daughter reassured her as to his indulgence in respect to

her absence. All her interest now became centred on a rapid recovery, and she made sundry attempts to bring the doctor to book as to the date when she would be able to resume work again, which he smilingly evaded. She was conscious, however, of increasing bodily vigor, which was comforting. The inability of her eyes to endure the light was her chief discomfort, a condition which her physician appeared to her to ignore, until he arrived one morning with a brother practitioner, who proved to be an oculist, and who had brought with him some of the apparatus of his specialty for the purpose of a diagnosis. Constance could not bear the sphinx-like urbanities which followed the examination. She felt possessed by a desire to have the exact condition of affairs revealed to her. She lifted her head, and addressing her own doctor, said:

"I should like to know the truth, please. Do not conceal anything. It will be much worse for me to find out later that something has been kept back."

The family physician looked at the specialist as much as to say that he proposed to throw the burden on him, but he answered, "So far as your general physical condition is concerned, you are practically well, Mrs. Stuart. All the brain symptoms have disappeared, and there are no lesions of any kind. It is now simply a question of nerves—and your eyes. Dr. Dale can speak more authoritatively about the latter."

Dr. Dale, the oculist, a man in the prime of life, with precise methods and a closely cut Van Dyke beard, hesitated briefly, as though he were

analyzing his patient, then said with courteous incisiveness—"It is a question of nerves, as Dr. Baldwin has explained. The nerves affected in your case are those of the eyes. Since you have expressed a wish to know the exact state of affairs, I take you at your word, Mrs. Stuart. I agree with you that it is more satisfactory to know the truth, and I am glad to be able to assure you that by the end of six months, if you give your eyes entire rest, their weakness will be cured, and you will be able to use them as freely as before."

He had rather the air of conferring a benefit than of pronouncing a sentence, and Constance received his statement in that spirit.

"Thank you," she said. "I will be as careful as I can."

"The condition of your cure," the specialist continued with polite relentlessness, "is that you abstain from using them altogether."

Constance experienced a thrill of concern. "Which means?"

"It means, Mrs. Stuart, that you must not sew, read, write, or undertake any form of application where the eyes are a factor."

She could not believe her ears. "I am a clerk in a law-office. My employment is stenography and type-writing," she said, tentatively.

He nodded. Evidently he had been informed. "It will be impossible for you to continue it."

"But I must. I must do my work. My children are dependent on it." Her tone suggested that there could be no answer to such a plea.

"You cannot. If you do, you will become blind. I am very sorry for you."

The truth was out. She lay dumfounded. "Blind? Blind?" she echoed.

"But there is not the least danger of your becoming blind if you obey my instructions. You will be entirely cured, as I have said."

There was a painful silence. Her sentence was too appalling to grasp. There must be some escape from it. "Six months? Half a year?"

"Knowing your necessities, I have given you the shortest period that I dared consistent with perfect recovery. You will have to wear colored glasses at first," he continued, seeking a business-like basis, "and accustom yourself to do without them by degrees. I will bring them to-morrow."

She leaned back on her pillow bewildered. The trickling of a tear into her mouth reminded her that she could not afford to cry, though but for the presence of the doctors she knew that she would have burst into sobs. Her plight demanded thought, not sorrow. But what could she do? What, indeed? Yet, even as she asked herself the dreadful question, she began to nerve herself not only against breaking down at the moment, but against the threat of the future. She would keep a stiff upper lip in the teeth of all the odds, and be able to manage somehow. As thus she reasoned, swallowing the salt of her single moment of weakness, she heard Dr. Baldwin saying:

"You have had a very fortunate escape, all things considered. It might have been much worse. You might have disfigured yourself permanently, which for you," he added with a gallant bow, "would have been a serious matter, indeed. As it is, you will be able to do everything

as formerly in another week, except use your eyes. Your friends will look after you, Mrs. Stuart, and six months will pass much more quickly than you expect."

"I don't suppose they'll let me starve," she found herself saying, though the notion of a return to alms almost strangled her effort at buoyancy, so that the sprightliness of her tone competed with the water in her eyes, as the sun struggles with the rain-pour just before it clears up. But she remembered that the room was dark, and that they could not see her tears. "Wasn't I a fool to jump off that car?"

"You were unlucky, that's all. You mustn't be too hard on yourself. It is the privilege of the young to jump, and you will jump again." It was Dr. Dale who spoke. His enunciation imparted a cleansing value to his note of sympathy, just as it had ruthlessly epitomized her tragedy a few minutes before.

"But I am not young; that is the folly of it," she protested.

The oculist smiled. "Excuse me if I differ with you," said he. "You have the best years of your life before you."

They left her under the spell of this assertion, which lingered in her mind on account of its absurdity, until in sheer self-defence she said to herself under her breath that she was only thirty-one. The best years of her life! And yet he knew that she was to be deprived during half of one of them of the joy of seeing and the source of her livelihood. What could he mean?

In taking his departure, Dr. Baldwin, by way

of showing his friendliness, had volunteered to write to her employer. "I know Mr. Perry," he said, "and I will explain to him the situation. Perhaps he will be able to keep your place for you."

Constance had interposed no objection. It would obviate the necessity of an elaborate explanation on her part, and would, moreover, be a guaranty of her later usefulness. The future would take care of itself; it was the present which stared her in the face and demanded an immediate answer.

One solution of her quandary was offered to her a few days later. Dr. Baldwin had given her permission to get up and resume her ordinary household duties as soon as her glasses arrived, which proved to be the next morning, as the oculist had promised. Consequently, she dressed herself and sat with her children in the parlor that afternoon, and on the following day rose, bent on facing the new problem of existence with a clear brain and resigned spirit. If Mr. Perry would save her place for her, so much the better. But obviously there was nothing for her to do in the office until she was cured. She must, either through her own energies or the advice of others, discover some employment compatible with her infirmity. She might have to accept help at first, for the money she had on hand would be needed to pay the bills of the two physicians, which would necessarily be considerable; but with the aid of her friends she would surely be able to find some handiwork which would yield her enough to keep her treasures well fed and decently clothed. Humiliating as it would be to have recourse to others, it was clearly

her duty to inform her friends of her predicament, and invite their counsel. They would only thank her, she knew, and she certainly was fortunate in having three persons, to whom she felt at liberty to apply, so pleasantly interested in her welfare as her employer, Mrs. Wilson, and the Reverend George Prentiss. Mr. Perry was to be made aware of what had befallen her, without further action on her part; but she would write to the two others, and soon, for the thought was harassing her that her employer, in a spirit of benevolence, might try to invent duties for her at the office, and give her some sinecure in order that she might retain her salary. This would be galling to her self-respect, and was not to be entertained for a moment. As the possibility of it grew upon her she became quite agitated; so much so that in the hope of heading off any such attempt by him, she dictated to her daughter, that afternoon, letters to Mrs. Wilson and the clergyman, informing them briefly what had occurred.

Just after the little girl had returned from putting these in the letter-box, and Constance was musing over a cup of tea, a messenger with a note arrived. It was from Gordon Perry, and read by Henrietta it ran as follows: Might he not call that evening? He had the doctor's permission to do so; and she was to send a simple "Yes" or "No" by the bearer. Now for it, she thought; he was coming to overwhelm her with his cunning schemes for continuing her salary. Her first impulse was to protect herself by delay; to ask him to wait a day or two until she felt stronger. But this would be a subterfuge, and, excepting that she dreaded

his philanthropy, she yearned to see him. He would put her in touch with the world again, from which she had been shut off too long. "No" trembled on her lips, but the fear of hurting his feelings occurred to her in the nick of time as a counterbalance to her dread of being pauperized by him, and her natural inclinations found utterance.

"Tell Mr. Perry, yes," she answered, and her spirits rose from that moment, though she resolved to be as firm as a rock on the threatened issue. She ascribed his coming in the evening rather than the afternoon to his being busy at the office, and as she put the children to bed she reflected that it would be pleasant to have an uninterrupted visit. She made her toilette as best she could with Mrs. Harrity's aid, and she inwardly rejoiced again that she had not broken her nose.

Gordon arrived about half-past eight. The cheer which his manner expressed did not detract from its sympathy. It seemed to say that he recognized and deplored her misfortune, but took for granted her preference to face it smilingly, and not to waste time in superfluous lamentation. At the same time, she could not but notice his eager solicitude and the ardor of his bearing, which was slightly disconcerting. Yet he made her tell him the details of the accident, listening with the ear of a lawyer. At the close his brow clouded slightly as though her story failed to coincide with his prepossessions.

"You see I haven't any case, have I?" she said, divining what was passing in his mind. She cherished a half hope that his cleverness might still extract a just cause of action from her delinquency.

"Not on your evidence."

"So I supposed. Those are the real facts. I jumped before the car stopped, though the conductor warned me, and I heard the bell."

"That settles it; contributory negligence. But the trained nurse who was with you tells a different story."

"Loretta has been to see you?"

"Yes. She came ostensibly for her pay night before last. But she seemed very anxious to testify in court in your favor. She says the conductor wasn't looking at first, and that he pushed you off the car just as you were jumping."

Constance shook her head. "She is entirely mistaken as to the last part."

"There is nothing to be said. It struck me that Miss Davis, unlike most women, enjoyed the prospect of being a witness. It was a great event to her, and she would be able to do you a good turn." He sat for a moment pondering this diagnosis, then with a start, as though he had been surprised in a trivial occupation, exclaimed:

"But what does it matter whether you can get paltry damages or not? I did not come here to consider that. I came to talk with you about your future."

He spoke the last words with a tender cadence which was partly lost on Constance, for she sprang to the conclusion that the moment for her to display firmness had arrived, and that he was about to broach a scheme for retaining her in his employment.

"I must find some other occupation for the next six months, of course. I am forbidden to use my

eyes for any purpose. I have written to Mrs. Wilson and my rector, thinking they may know of some opening or vacancy where I could work with my hands or do errands until my eyes are well." Then noticing the curious smile with which he received this rather impetuous announcement, and apprehensive lest he might be hurt by her avowed reliance on others, she added: "And you, too, must be on the lookout for me. You may hear of something which would suit me."

"As for that, do you suppose that because your service to me is interrupted I would not stand in the breach? That I would not insist on continuing your salary until you were able to return to your post?"

"I knew it would be just like you to wish to," she said, quickly, "but I could not possibly allow it. That's why I wrote to Mrs. Wilson and Mr. Prentiss," she added, not averse to having him know the real reason now that it could serve her as a shield.

Her naïve admission was evidently an agreeable piece of intelligence. "I took for granted that your salary would continue. That was a matter I did not have in mind in the least."

"It can't, I assure you."

He appeared entertained by her adamantine air. "Why not?"

"It isn't an absence of a week or two," she said, trying to show herself reasonable. "It will be six months before I am able to work again."

"A whole six months?"

She met the mockery in his tone with quiet determination. "I could not allow anyone to sup-

port me for that period. Do you not see that I must find something to do in order to remain happy?"

"Happy? You do not consider my side. Do you not see that a haggling calendar account of weeks and months is not applicable to such service as you render me? How would the satisfaction of saving the modest sum I pay you compare with that I should derive from enabling you to get well as rapidly as possible, untormented by painful necessities?"

There was a strange gleam in his eyes. She looked at him wonderingly. His rhetoric troubled her, and by dint of it he had managed to make her scruples seem ungenerous. But she was unconvinced.

"You would be obliged to pay someone else," she replied with cruel practicality.

"Enough of this," he said, impetuously. "It is absurd. I have something very different at heart. When I spoke of your future just now, Constance, it was to tell you that I have come here, to-night, to ask you to be my wife—to say to you that I love you devotedly and cannot live without you. This is my errand. It is not friendship I offer, it is not pity, it is not esteem for your gentle, strong soul, it is passionate human love."

He paused and there was profound silence in the darkened room where they could scarcely see each other's faces. Constance trembled like a leaf. In a moment the whole card-board house of sisterly affection fell about her ears, and she knew the truth. These were the sweetest words she had

ever listened to, though they stabbed her like a knife. "Oh!" she whispered, "Oh!"

"Is it such a surprise, Constance?" he murmured, ascribing her accents of dismay to that source. "You must have known you were very dear to me."

The dimness gave her time to consider how she should deal with this startling certainty, the music of which was dancing in her brain. The meaning of his devotion was now so clear. Yet she had never guessed either his purpose or the secret of her own disconcerting heart-beats.

"I knew you were fond of me, but it never occurred to me that you could think of me as a wife."

"Why not? You are beautiful and charming as well as sweet and wise, and I adore you."

"I liked to feel that we should go on being dear friends for the rest of our lives," she answered, tingling with the thrill which this avowal caused her.

From the tremor of her speech he was emboldened to regard the sigh which followed this simple voicing of the exact truth as an ellipsis hiding a precious secret.

"Then you love me, Constance?"

Whatever happened, why should he not know? Why should she deny herself that ecstasy?

"Oh, yes, Gordon, I love you dearly."

"And you will be my wife?"

"How can I, Gordon? You know I must not." There was gentle pleading in her tone and a tinge of renunciating sadness.

"I mean presently. As soon as you obtain a divorce?"

The ugly word brought back reality. "Oh, no, we must put it from us. It is a delightful vision, but we must dismiss it forever."

"Why?" he asked, with the resonance of vigorous manhood.

"Because it would be an offence."

"Against what?"

"The eternal fitness of things." This phrase of Mrs. Wilson's rose to her lips again as a shibboleth. "I have made my mistake," she murmured. "I must suffer the penalty of it."

"Never!" he ejaculated. "It would be monstrous—monstrous."

There was a momentary silence. While he gazed at her ardently he was seeking command of himself so as to plead his cause with discriminating lucidity. To her darkened sight imagination pictured a swift river of fire flowing between them, across which they could touch their finger-tips, but no more.

"Do not think," he said, "that I have not considered this question from your side. It has been in my thoughts night and day for months. The idea of divorce is repugnant to you—though you have ceased to love the husband who deeply wronged you. You shrink even more from marrying again because your children's father is still alive. If he were dead, the bar would be removed, and you would not hesitate. I appeal to your common sense, Constance. What sound reason is there why you should sacrifice your happiness—the happiness of us both?"

"It is not a question of common sense—is it?"

It was a faltering query which followed the assertion. "The question is, what is right?"

"Amen to that!" he cried. "Yes, right, right. And who says it is not right?"

She had been so sure she would never marry again that she had never sought exact knowledge of her church's attitude in this regard, and yet now she had her fears. She knew that no Roman Catholic could marry again during the life of a divorced husband or wife, except by special dispensation, and she was aware of the increasing reluctance of the officials of her own church in this country to give the sanction of the marriage service to the remarriage of divorced persons; but she had never examined the church canon on the subject, for she had flattered herself that she would never need to. Discussions of the topic which she had listened to or read had played like lightnings around her oblivious head, but had served merely to intensify her repugnance to the blatant divorces and double-quick marriages, which she had seen heralded from time to time in the daily press, and which had recently been brought home to her with peculiar force by the events in Mrs. Wilson's family circle. Now the flare of the lightning was in her own eyes, and her brain was numb with the emotion of the personal shock.

"Would Mr. Prentiss marry me to you?" she asked, seeking as usual the vital issue.

"Your clergyman?" His query was merely to gain time. But he loved directness, too. "Suppose that he would not, there are plenty of clergymen who would."

"But he is my clergyman."

Gordon moved his chair nearer, and bending forward, took her hand in both of his.

"Dearest, this question is for you and me to settle, not for any outsider. It must bear the test of right and wrong, as you say, but I ask you to look at it as an intelligent human being, as the sane, noble-hearted American woman you are. The State—the considered law of the community in which we live—gives you the right to a divorce and freedom to marry again. Who stands in the way? Your clergyman—the representative of your church. The church erects a standard of conduct of its own and asks you to sacrifice your life to it. It is the church against the State—against the people. It is superstition and privilege against common sense and justice. I should like to prove to you by arguments how truly this is so."

"But I would rather not listen to your arguments now," she interposed. "I am on your side already. My heart is, and—I think my common sense."

His pulses gave a bound. "Then nothing can keep us apart!" he cried, pressing his lips upon her hands and kissing them again and again. "You are mine, we belong to one another. Why should a young and beautiful woman starve her being on such a plea, and reject such happiness as this?"

She drew her hands gently away, and herself beyond his reach. "Ah, you mustn't. If my church objects, it must have a reason, and I must hear that reason, Gordon. I must consult with Mr. Prentiss—with him and others. He is not an outsider. He was my friend and helper in the bitterest hours of my life."

"He will do his best to take you from me."

She shivered. "How do you know?"

"He cannot help himself. The canon of the Episcopal Church forbids a clergyman to marry one who has been divorced for any cause except adultery. The Catholic Church goes one step further and forbids altogether the remarriage of divorced persons. It does not recognize divorce. A large number of the clergy of your church are fiercely agitating the adoption of a similar absolute restriction. The two churches—and their attitude has stirred up other denominations—are seeking to fasten upon the American conscience an ideal inconsistent with the free development of human society."

She caught at the phrase. "Yet it is an ideal."

Gordon took a long breath. In the ardor of his mental independence he seemed to be seeking some fit word to epitomize his deduction.

"It is a fetish!" he said, earnestly. "It represents the past—privilege—superstition—injustice, as I have already told you."

"Oh, no," she murmured, "it cannot be simply that. You forget that I am a woman. You do not realize what the church means to me."

"I remember that you are an American woman."

The remark evidently impressed her. She pondered it briefly before she said, "I am, and I know how much that ought to mean. I wish to be worthy of it." She appeared troubled; then putting her hand to her head she rose, seeking instinctively an end of the interview. "I must think it over. You must not talk to me any more tonight. I did not realize how weak I am." Sud-

denly she exclaimed, "Ah, Gordon, you do not understand all! I forsook the church once in the pride of my heart. I wandered among false gods, and it took me back without a word of rebuke for my independence. I must do what is right this time—what is really right—at any cost."

As she stood in the shadow, erect and piteous, but with the aspect of spiritual aspiration in her voice and figure, stalwart as he was in his sense of righteousness, he thought of Marguerite in the prison scene when Faust implores her to fly with him.

"Forgive me," he said, "for having tired and harassed you. It was my love for you that led me on." He spoke with tenderness, and under the spell of his mood dropped on one knee beside her and looked up in her face.

"You may tell me about that before you go," she whispered, like one spellbound.

"It is not much to tell—except that it means everything to me. It has grown from a tiny seed, little by little, until it has become the harvest and the glory of my manhood. Ah, Constance, we love each other. How much that means. It sets the seal of beauty on this commonplace world. It will transfigure life for both of us."

She started. "The seal of beauty?" she murmured, as to herself. "If I were but sure of that! What I fear is lest I mar the beauty of the world, and so sin."

"It was my mother's hope that we should marry," he said, reverting to concrete ground.

"I think so," she answered, faintly, pressing his hand.

"And her idea was to do right."

"I know."

She sighed, then whispered, "You must go now."

Rising from his posture beside her he prepared to obey. They stood for an instant, irresolute, then, as by a common impulse, his arms opened and she suffered herself to be clasped in his strong embrace. It seemed to him as he felt her head upon his breast and her nervous, wistful face looked up into his that his happiness was assured. But she was thinking that come what might—and she was conscious of a dreadful uncertainty in her heart—she would not deny herself this single draught of the cup of happiness. It was a precious, sentient joy to be thought beautiful, and to feel that she was desired for herself alone by this hero of her ripe womanhood. So she let herself go as one who snatches at escaping joy, and their lips met in the full rapture of a lover's kiss.

XIX

THE news of the tragedy in her daughter's life—of the double domestic tragedy, which included her nephew—came to Mrs. Wilson as an appalling surprise. She had gathered from the tenor of Lucille's letters that her daughter was not entirely happy; but her appreciation of this was derived rather from what she read between the lines than from actual admissions. It had never entered her head that there was danger of a rupture between Lucille and her husband until the dreadful truth was disclosed to her by her brother. From him she learned that Paul and his wife had separated and were to be divorced because of the relations between Paul's wife and Clarence Waldo. Carleton Howard added that his son had not the heart to tell her himself before his departure for New York, and had delegated him to break the intelligence.

When the first wholesale mutual commiserations had been exchanged between the brother and sister, Mrs. Wilson realized that she was practically in the dark regarding Lucille. Paul's calamity was so completely the controlling thought in her brother's mind that, though he occasionally deplored the plight in which his niece appeared to be left, he was evidently bent on working his way through the labyrinth of his personal dismay until

he could find a clue which would lead his mind to daylight. After various ebullitions of anger and disgust, he found this at last in the assertion that it was best for Paul to be rid of such a wife; that he had never really fancied his daughter-in-law, and that the only course was to obliterate her from their memory. She had disgraced the family, and her name was never to be mentioned again in his presence. This was an eminently masculine method of disposing of the matter. After Mr. Howard had accepted it as a solution, he was able to compose himself in his chair and to smoke. For the past two days, ever since Paul had talked to him, he had been walking up and down his library, champing an unlighted cigar, with the measured stalk of a grim lion. Now his brow lifted appreciably. But his sister's eyes fell before his aspect of dignified relief. His solution was of no avail to her. It could not answer the distressing questions which were haunting her. Why had not Lucille written? What did the silence mean? She resolved that if she did not hear something in the morning she would take the first train East, for might not the child be sobbing her heart out, too mortified even to confide in her mother? Thus speculating, Mrs. Wilson looked up to inquire once again whether Paul had not said something more definite regarding his cousin. She had asked this twice already, and on each occasion Mr. Howard had suspended his cogitations in order to ransack his memory, but only in vain; which was not strange, for Paul had taken pains in his conversation with his father to avoid unnecessary allusion to Lucille, letting her appear, like himself,

an innocent victim of the family disaster. Mr. Howard was now equally unsuccessful in his recollection. Yet while he was speaking, the tension of Mrs. Wilson's mind was relieved by the receipt of a telegram. Lucille was on her way from Newport, and would reach Benham the following evening.

Mrs. Wilson met her at the station. The mother and daughter embraced with emotion, thus betraying what was uppermost in the thought of each. But Lucille promptly recovered her composure, chatting briskly in the carriage as though she were bent on avoiding for the time being the crucial topic. On reaching the house she evinced a lively interest in the supper which had been prepared for her, eating with appetite and leading the conversation to matters of secondary import. Mrs. Wilson, though burning to ask and to hear everything, held her peace and bridled her impatience. It seemed to her that Lucille was looking well, and had gained in social dignity, which might partly be accounted for by the fact that she was a matron and a mother, partly by a slight access of flesh; but the impression produced on Mrs. Wilson's mind was that she appeared less spiritually heedless than formerly—a consummation devoutly to be desired in this hour of stress. As she watched her at table she noted with a mother's pride the tastefulness of her attire, and the sophistication of her speech. For the first time—much as she had longed for it in the past—the hope took root in her heart that their tastes might yet some day coincide, and each find in allegiance to the fit development of the human race the true zest of life.

Yet how could Lucille be so calm? How could she appear so unconcerned?

Lucille's mask, such as it was, was not lifted until she had been shown to her room. "I will come to you presently, mamma," she said, and Mrs. Wilson understood what was meant. When she came—it was to her mother's boudoir and study—she had loosened her hair, and was wrapped in a dainty pink and white wrapper. She established herself comfortably on a lounge, and crossed her hands on her breast. Mrs. Wilson was sitting at her desk obliquely in the line of vision, so she had merely to turn her head on her supported elbow in order to command her daughter's expression. So they sat for a moment, until Lucille said:

"Well, mamma, I suppose Paul has told you everything. Clarence and I have separated for good, and I am on the way to South Dakota."

There was a profound silence. In spite of the introduction the import of the last words was lost on Mrs. Wilson. She was simply puzzled. "South Dakota?" she queried. "Paul told me nothing. Your uncle——"

"You know surely what has happened?" It was Lucille's turn to look surprised.

"I know, my child, that your husband has been false to you with your cousin Paul's wife."

"And both Paul and I are to obtain a divorce."

Mrs. Wilson winced. "Your uncle intimated as much in the case of Paul. I had hoped you might not think it obligatory to break absolutely with your husband. Or, rather, Lucille, my mind was

so full of distress for you that I did not look beyond the dreadful present. You do not know how my heart bleeds for you, dear."

As she spoke, Mrs. Wilson left her seat, and kneeling beside the lounge, put her arms around her daughter's neck. Lucille, grateful for the sympathy, raised herself to receive and return the embrace, but her speech was calm.

"It is a mortification, of course; it would be to any woman. If he had been faithful to me, I would never have left him. But we were mismated from the first. We found out six months after our marriage that we bored each other; and then we drifted apart. So there would be no use trying to patch it up. We should only lead a dog and cat life. Besides—" she paused an instant, then interjected, "I hoped Paul had broken this to you, mamma—I want to be free because I am going to marry again."

Mrs. Wilson sprang back as though she had been buffeted. "Marry again?" she gasped.

Lucille spoke softly but with firmness. "I am going to marry Mr. Bradbury Nicholson of New York." She added a few words as to his identity, then with an emphasis intended to express the ardor of a soul which has come to its own at last, exclaimed:

"I'm deeply in love with him, mamma; and I never was with Clarence. I thought I was, but I wasn't. This time it's the real thing."

Mrs. Wilson rose and returning to her desk rested her head again upon her supported elbow. She was stunned. The shock of the announcement was such that she did not attempt to speak. But

Lucille, having begun, was evidently bent on making a clean breast of her affairs.

"So I am on my way to Sioux Falls to obtain a divorce."

"Why do you go there?"

"Because it is one of the quickest places. Residence is necessary to enable me to sue, and residence can be acquired by living there ninety days. Then, too, the courts don't insist on very strict proof, so I can obtain a divorce for neglect or cruelty, and avoid the unpleasantness of alleging anything worse. I thought of Connecticut, where the law allows a divorce for any such misconduct as permanently destroys one's happiness and defeats the marriage relation, but my lawyer said it would be simpler and quicker to go to South Dakota. Clarence knows all about it, and is only too glad, and he has agreed to give up all claim on baby."

The reference to her grandchild plunged a fresh dagger into Mrs. Wilson's heart.

"Where is your baby?" she asked, sternly. She had already in the carriage inquired for its welfare, taking for granted that its mother had been unwilling to bring it on what had appeared to be a flying journey.

"At Newport. Two of my maids and baby are to join me here. I don't wish to start for a week, if you will keep me, and, as there was packing still to be done, and the Newport air is fresher so early in the autumn, I told them to follow. You may keep baby here until I send for her, if it would make you feel any happier, mamma."

Mrs. Wilson made no response to this self-sacrificing offer. She was asking herself whether it were

not her duty as an outraged parent to rise in her agony and, pointing to the door, bid Lucille choose between her lover and herself. But would not this be old-fashioned? Could she endure to quarrel with her own and only flesh and blood? Overwhelmed as she was by her daughter's absolute indifference to considerations which she reverenced as the laws of her being, Mrs. Wilson prided herself on being equally a leader of spiritual progress, a woman of the world, and an American. She recognized that it behooved her to display no less acumen and tact in dealing with her personal problem than in confronting the quandaries of others. She knew instinctively that violent opposition would simply alienate Lucille and confirm her in her purpose. It was obvious that their point of view was as divergent as the poles. How could Lucille take the affair so philosophically? How could she calmly regard the neglect and sin of her husband merely as the logical sequence of the discovery that they were mismated, and find a sufficient explanation for everything in the announcement that they had bored each other? Yet Mrs. Wilson appreciated in those moments of horror that it would be worse than futile to give bitter utterance to her emotions. By so doing she would alienate her daughter and fail to alter the situation. Though protesting with the full vigor of her being, she must be reasonable or she could accomplish nothing. So she put a curb upon her lips. There were so many things she wished to say that for a spell she could not formulate her thoughts. She was reminded that she appeared tongue-tied by hearing Lucille remark:

"I was afraid that you would be distressed, mamma. That's why I didn't write or consult you. You don't approve of divorce, I know. It's opposed to your ideas of things. But I've thought over everything thoroughly, and it's the only possible course for me."

This complacency was disconcerting as a stone wall, and made still plainer to Mrs. Wilson that the offender indulgently regretted the necessity of explaining and vindicating such common-sense principles.

"It is true, Lucille, that I disapprove of divorce on æsthetic if not religious grounds. It is an unsavory institution." She paused a moment to give complete effect to the phrase. "It seems to me to diminish spiritual self-respect, and to impair that feminine delicacy which is an essential ornament of civilization. At the same time, if you had told me that, on account of your husband's sin, you had decided not merely to leave him, but to dissolve the bond, I should have demurred, perhaps, but I should have acquiesced. I should have counselled you to live apart without divorce, as I regard marriage as a sacrament of the Christian church, but I should have accepted your decision to the contrary without a serious pang. But you have just told me, my child, that you are seeking a divorce from your husband because you are mismated, in order to become as quickly as possible the wife of another man, whom you profess to love. I cannot prevent you from doing this if you insist, but as your mother, I cannot let you commit what seems to me, from the most lenient standpoint, a gross indelicacy, without seeking to dissuade you."

In conjunction with her ambition to reason in a triple capacity, Mrs. Wilson was well aware that the world demands promptness of decision no less than wisdom from its busy leaders; that the public relies on the past equipment of the lawyer or the physician for correct advice on the spur of the moment. It was her custom to face confidently the problems of life which others invited her to solve, as a surgeon confronts the operating table, ready to do her best on the spot. She knew that the consciousness of being rushed is part of the penalty of success, and that half the effectiveness of a busy person consists in the ability to think and act quickly. So now, face to face with her own dire problem, her mind centred on the fit solution of her daughter's tragedy, she relied on the same method, yearning to apply the knife, tie up the ligaments and cauterize the heart-sorrow in summary fashion by virtue of her past equipment. So she spoke with conviction, yet aware that the problem presented had been hitherto for her mainly academic, and now for the first time loomed up on the horizon of life as an immediate practical issue.

Pursuing her theme Mrs. Wilson singled out for urgent protest the one point which stood out like an excrescence on the surface of the sorry story, and put all else in the background—the projected hasty marriage. Its precipitancy offended her most cherished sensibilities. With all the sentiment and mental suppleness at her command she endeavored to point out the vulgarity of the proceeding. How was it to be reconciled with true womanly refinement? Was the holy

state of matrimony to be shuffled off and on as though it were a misfit glove? She appealed to the claims of good taste and family pride. But, though Lucille listened decorously, it was obvious that the effect of the scandal of mutual prompt remarriages had no terrors for her. Or, rather, when her mother paused, she disputed it, claiming that the affair would be a seven days' wonder; that the world would speedily forget, or, at least, forgive, if the new ventures proved successful; that precipitancy in such cases was not novel, and that the people whose social approbation she desired would consider her sensible for putting an end to an intolerable relation and claiming her happiness at the earliest possible date.

From a wholesale plea of what she referred to as spiritual decency directed against unseemly haste, Mrs. Wilson, sick at heart, began to particularize, and at the same time enlarged her attitude so as to disclose her innate feeling against divorce in general. She spoke of the plight of the children concerned, and in alluding to her grandchild, her tone was piteous. The thought seemed to give her courage, so that when Lucille, who evidently had a pat response to this contention ready, sought to interrupt, Mrs. Wilson raised a warning hand to signify that she must insist on being heard to the end. She dwelt upon the value of the home to human society, and in this appeal she gave free utterance to her religious convictions, defending the sacredness of the marriage tie from the point of view of Christian orthodoxy. She spoke with emotion and at some length. Though she had never thought the matter out

hitherto as a personal issue, she found that she had in reserve a whole set of argumentative principles to back her æsthetic eloquence. She urged upon her daughter that if neither good taste, family pride, nor maternal solicitude would restrain her, she heed the teachings of the church, which had prescribed the law of strict domestic ties as essential to the righteous development of human civilization, and which regarded the family as the corner-stone of social order and social beauty. Was her only child prepared to fly so flagrantly in the face of this teaching? Would she refuse to reverence this standard? As she evolved this final plea, Mrs. Wilson felt herself on firmer ground. It seemed to her that she had welded all her protesting instincts into a comprehensive claim which could not be resisted, for, though emphasizing the obligations of the soul, she had tried to be both broad and modern. She had not quoted the language of Scripture—the words of Christ imposing close limitations, if not an absolute bar on divorce. She felt that there was more chance in influencing Lucille through an intellectual appeal to her sense of social wisdom based on present conditions, though to the speaker's own mind the modern argument was simply a vindication of the precious inspired truth. But she dismissed the thought that her daughter was regarding her as old-fashioned, and she spoke from the depths of her being, so that when she ceased, there were tears upon her cheeks.

Lucille had listened indulgently with downcast eyes. She was unmoved; nevertheless, with nervous inappropriateness, she turned slowly round

and round the wedding-ring on her finger as she revolved her mother's appeal. When the end came she remained respectfully silent for a moment, but there was matter-of-fact definiteness in her reply.

"You know, mamma, that you and I never did agree on things like that. I don't recognize the right of the church to interfere, so I put religion out of the question. As to injury to civilization, it seems to me of no advantage to society, and preposterous besides, that two persons utterly mismated, like Clarence and me, should continue wretched all our lives when the law of the land will set us free. What good would it do if I remained single?"

"Live apart, if you like; but to marry again—and so quickly, Lucille, is an offence both against the flesh and the spirit," said Mrs. Wilson, tensely. "Good? It would help to maintain the integrity of the home upon which progressive civilization rests."

Lucille pursed her lips. "I shall have a home when I marry again. A far happier home than before; and baby will be far happier than if she grew up in a discordant household where there was no love and mutual indifference. Besides, supposing I didn't marry again—supposing Paul's wife did not marry again, what would happen? We should lead immoral lives, as people similarly situated do in the Latin countries, where the church forbids the marriage of divorced persons. It ought to satisfy you, mamma, that there is not a word of truth in the story of too intimate relations between me and Mr. Nicholson circulated at Newport. I told him I should keep him at arm's

length until I was divorced and at liberty to marry him. I let him kiss me once, and that was all. What would a woman in Paris or London have done? The church there doesn't seem to mind what goes on behind the scenes, provided the mass of the people is kept in ignorance."

Mrs. Wilson had colored at the reference to calumniating rumors. It was clear, now, why Paul had preferred to speak by proxy. Could it be her own daughter who was claiming credit for such forbearance? Her first impulse was to inquire what conduct had given rise to the more serious imputation, but she shrank from the question. It was Lucille who spoke first.

"I assure you, I expect to have a very charming home, and, if I have more children, to bring them up well. In a year or two the hateful past will seem only a nightmare. Why should you or the church seek to deprive me of happiness? In my individual case our—your church would marry me because my husband had been unfaithful, provided I procured a divorce on that ground—which I do not intend to do. But I am defending myself on general principles. As your daughter you would wish me to have the courage of my convictions."

Mrs. Wilson sighed. This appeal to her independence was discouragingly genuine. "Then, where do you draw the line?" she asked, repeating a formula.

"As to divorce?" Lucille shrugged her shoulders. "The courts decide that, I suppose. I asked what the law was, and the lawyer told me."

Mrs. Wilson groaned. "The courts! And, ac-

cordingly, you apply to the court which will grant you a divorce most speedily."

"And with the least possible unpleasant procedure. Certainly, I wish to be married as soon as possible."

"The law must be changed." Mrs. Wilson clasped her hands energetically.

"Very likely, mamma. Now we are on sensible ground. But if the law were made more strict the church would still object. So it wouldn't make much difference from your point of view."

There was a touch of complacent paganism in the tone of this last remark which fused Mrs. Wilson's poignant emotions to a fever point.

"It crucifies renunciation. It is individualism run mad. Child, child!" she exclaimed, "do not be too sure that easy-going rationalism is the answer to all the problems of the universe. The time will yet come when you will recognize what ideals mean—when your eyes will be opened to the unseen things of the spirit. Before you take this step I beg of you to talk with Mr. Prentiss."

Lucille shook her head, but her reply was unexpectedly humble. She avoided an opinion regarding the prophecy, but her words disclosed that she wished her mother to perceive that her soul had its own troubles, and was not altogether self-congratulatory in its processes.

"Of course I would give anything if Clarence and I had not fallen out, and our marriage proved a failure. I can see that such an experience takes the freshness from any woman's life. It would be of no use, however, for me to see Mr. Prentiss. We should differ fundamentally. I do not regard

marriage as a sacrament, he does. You see I have considered the question from all sides, mamma."

"You regard it as a contract, I suppose," said Mrs. Wilson, pensively.

"Yes; the most solemn, the most important of contracts, if you like, but a contract." Lucille was trying to be reasonable, but her sense of humor suddenly getting the better of her filial discretion, she added:

"Why, of course, it is simply a contract. Everyone except clergymen regards it so nowadays. If Clarence had died, I could marry again; why shouldn't I be just as free, when he has been untrue to me, to regard our marriage at an end—and——"

Mrs. Wilson put up her hand. "I am familiar with the argument. For adultery, perhaps, yes; but for everything else, no. And the Roman Church forbids it absolutely." She reflected a moment, then, as one who has worked out vindication for an ancient principle by the light of modern ideas, she added, impressively, "It may well be, that from the standpoint of the welfare of the home—the protection of human society against rampant selfish individualism—the oldest church of all was wise, and is wise, in insisting on adherence to the letter of the words of Christ as best adapted to the safety of civilization. And that, too," she continued, significantly, "even though the souls affected sin in secret, because they cannot override the law. I do not say," she added, noticing the surprise in her daughter's face, "that this winking of the church is defensible; but I submit that the consequences can be no worse than

those resulting from the flood-tide of easy divorce, the fruit of unbridled caprice."

"And what do you say to the attitude of the Church of England, of which our Episcopal Church is an offshoot. An English woman in Newport told me the other day that a wife cannot obtain a divorce from her husband unless infidelity be coupled with cruel and abusive treatment, though the contrary is true in case of a man. A husband can have his affairs, provided he does not make them public or beat his wife, but she must toe the mark. And in England the law of the church is the law of the land."

Mrs. Wilson pondered a moment. "Our Episcopal Church sanctions no such distinction. But, after all, woman is not quite the same as man. Her standard is different; she still expects to be held to a subtler sense of beauty and duty in matters which involve the perpetuation of the race. The English rule seems old-fashioned to us, for we insist on equal purity for the husband and the wife as essential to domestic unity. Yet the framers of that law were wise in their day; wise, surely, if the doctrine of loose marital bonds is to imperil the permanence of the institution we call the family."

"But I fail to see the advantage to human society of any family the two chief members of which are at daggers drawn, and mutually unhappy."

Mrs. Wilson recognized that the gulf of contradiction which yawned between them was bottomless, and not to be bridged. We learn with reluctance that each generation is a law unto itself. Yet she said, as a a swan song, "The Episcopal Church and also the Roman Catholic Church stand

for, and reverence, the ideals of beauty, of imagination, of aspiration. They abhor spiritual commonness. They forget not the words of the proverb: 'Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.' Divorce is a device of mediocrity and dwarfed vision. It is a perquisite of commonness."

The phrase made Lucille start, and she sat troubled for a moment. To be adjudged common was the most disconcerting indictment which could have been framed. But reflection was reassuring. She answered presently.

"I'm sure it won't make any difference in my case; everybody I care about will call on me just the same."

Meanwhile, under the shock to her convictions, Mrs. Wilson had bowed her face on her hands on her desk, and hot tears moistened her palms. Lucille watched her nervously, then rose and went to her, and put her arm about her. "You mustn't feel so badly, mamma. It will come out all right: I know it will. I am certain to be happy—and though you may not think it, I am much more serious than I used to be. Of course, I wouldn't belong to any other church than the Episcopal; all the nicest people one knows are Episcopalians now. As you say, that and the Roman Catholic are the only ones which appeal to the imagination."

Mrs. Wilson's tears flowed faster at this demonstration of sympathy. She accepted and was soothed by the caresses, but she was ashamed of and stunned by her defeat, and could not reconcile herself to it. She would make one effort more.

"Since you will not permit Mr. Prentiss to re-

monstrate with you," she said, "you will, at least, talk with your uncle?"

Lucille reflected. She had not forgotten the diamond tiara with which her uncle had presented her as a wedding present, the crowning act of many splendid donations, though to have only one tiara had already become a sign of relative impecuniosity in the social circle in which she aspired to move. The wife of a genuine multi-millionaire was expected to have as many tiaras as she had evening dresses. Lucille was fond of her uncle, and she still wished to appear what she considered reasonable. "He could not alter my determination, mamma. But if Uncle Carleton wishes to talk with me, I shall feel bound to listen," she responded.

Mrs. Wilson felt encouraged by the first effect on her brother of the announcement of Lucille's plans. From Paul's report, Mr. Howard had assumed that his niece, like his son, was simply a victim of the distressing double-tragedy, and the news of Lucille's projected hasty divorce with a view to immediate remarriage offended his sense of propriety, and evoked at once a fiat no less explicit than his earlier declaration that the sooner Paul's nuptial knot was cut, and the wretched business terminated, the better. His present words—that such indecorous proceedings were not to be tolerated for a moment—were uttered with the deliberate emphasis which marked his important verdicts—his railroad manner, some people called it—and conveyed the impression of a reserve force not to be resisted with impunity. The interview between him and Lucille took place in the evening,

and lasted nearly an hour. Mrs. Wilson was not present. At its close she heard her daughter reenter the house through the private passageway and go up-stairs. Shortly after, her brother joined her. He sat for a few moments without speaking, as though reviewing what had occurred, then said, with the plausible air of one claiming the right to revise a judgment in the light of having heard the other side of the issue:

"Apparently we have to decide whether we prefer that Lucille should marry young Nicholson as soon as the law allows, or that she should continue to receive his marked attentions, which have already inspired compromising rumors, happily baseless. It seems that the object of her infatuation—a circumstance which she did not state to you—is anxious—in fact, hopes, to obtain one of the minor diplomatic appointments. His father, as you know, is president of the Chemical Trust and intimate with some of the influential Senators. Should I intervene in his behalf with the authorities at Washington, the probabilities of his obtaining the position, already excellent, will be improved, provided, of course, there is no scandal. If we could shut Lucille up—confine her by summary process for six months, until she had time to reflect—she might change her attitude. At any rate, we should avoid the precipitancy which is the most objectionable feature of the affair. But the girl is a free agent. We cannot prevent her from going to South Dakota if she insists, and she does insist. She refuses to wait the three years requisite to obtain a divorce for desertion here; and were she to allege what the newspapers are pleased to

call the statutory offence, the proof required by our court would be exceedingly painful. She prefers a more accommodating jurisdiction, where fewer questions are asked, and the tie is promptly dissolved. So on the whole——"

He paused to choose his phraseology, and his sister, guessing its substance, interposed:

"Then you sided with her?"

"On the contrary, I opposed her strenuously. I expressed my disapproval in positive terms. But it became evident to me that she is in love with this young man and determined to marry him, and from every point of view I prefer the sanction of the law to clandestine illicit relations. Would you prefer to have her abstain from a divorce and live abroad with Bradbury Nicholson? That is what she intimated would happen if she followed our wishes."

Mrs. Wilson groaned. "And to think that this is the reasoning of my daughter!"

"I will do her the justice to say," continued Mr. Howard, joining the points of his fingers, "that she talked quietly and with some discrimination. It troubles her greatly that you are distressed. I disapprove of her conduct, but I was pleased on the whole with her mental powers."

"Yes. She is cleverer than I supposed," murmured Mrs. Wilson. "So you gave in?"

"Not at all. We agreed to differ. I presume you did not wish me to quarrel with her?"

"Oh, no. We must never do that."

"Exactly. In the course of our discussion she asked me if I thought she ought to remain a widow

all her days, and, as a reasonable human being, I was obliged to admit that there was much to be said on her side."

"A widow! She is not a widow."

"She chose the word, not I. She tells me that you have already discussed with her the religious —the sentimental side of the question."

"And failed utterly."

There was a silence, which was broken by the banker. "I advise you, Miriam, to make the best of a painful situation. There are only two courses open: to disown her, or to let her follow her own course, and put the best front on it we can. After all, she is only doing what thousands of other women in this country——"

"Ah, yes!" cried Mrs. Wilson. "And with that argument what becomes of noble standards—of fine ideals of life? I almost wish I had the moral courage to show myself the Spartan mother, and to disown her."

"Oh, no, you don't. You would only make yourself miserable." Having discovered that he had been checkmated, it was a business maxim with Mr. Howard to accept the inevitable and clear the board of vain regrets. He set himself to counteract these hysterical manifestations of his sister. "Besides, it would do no good in this case to cut off the revenue, for Nicholson has plenty for them both. To disinherit one's children is an antiquated method of self-torture."

"I had no reference to money," answered Mrs. Wilson, with a gesture to express disdain for the consideration. "I was thinking of my love as a mother."

"You cannot help loving her, whatever happens," answered her brother significantly.

Mrs. Wilson acknowledged the force of this comment by a piteous stare. She forsook the personal for the philosophic attitude. "But if this loose view of the marriage tie is to obtain, where is it to end? How long will it be before we imitate the degeneracy of Rome? We are imitating it already."

"I made a similar remark to Lucille. I reminded her that the ease and frequency of divorce were among the causes of the decline of Rome. Her reply was that we are Americans, not Romans. Of course, there is something in what she says. Our point of view is very different from theirs." Mr. Howard felt of his strong chin meditatively.

"But where is it to end?" repeated Mrs. Wilson in a tragic tone.

He shook his head. "It is an abuse, I admit; especially as administered in some of our States. Presently, when we get time, we Americans will take the question up and go into it thoroughly."

The hopeless incongruity of this reply from Mrs. Wilson's point of view put the finishing touch to their conversation. It was obvious to her that she could not expect true sympathy or comprehension from her brother. It was clear that he was satisfied with opportunist methods, and that the precise truth had no immediate charms for him.

Rebuffed in respect to the support of both her champions, Mrs. Wilson felt strangely powerless; almost limp. She made no further appeal to her daughter; the discussion was not resumed, but

when the baby arrived, she reminded Lucille of the proposal that she keep possession of her grandchild during its mother's sojourn in South Dakota, and accepted it. This was some comfort, and Mrs. Wilson remained in a trance, as it were, seeking neither sympathy nor outside suggestion until after the evil day of Mrs. Waldo's departure.

Not until then did she send for Mr. Prentiss. That the rector could do nothing to thwart the programme outlined by Lucille was clear, and she had dreaded the possibility of his advising an attitude on her part which would induce complete estrangement from her daughter. When he came she was relieved that he made no such suggestion. He seemed, like herself, overwhelmed with dismay, and, after he had heard her story, equally conscious of helplessness in the premises. Indeed it resulted that Mr. Prentiss, having realized that he could be of no avail in the particular emergency, turned from the shocking present to the future. Lucille was beyond the pale of influence (though he declared his intention of writing to her), but this painful example would be a fresh spur to the church to take strong ground against the deadly peril to Christian civilization involved in playing fast and loose with the marriage tie. Mr. Prentiss glowed with the thought of what he could and would put into a sermon. Consciousness of the abuse had for some time been smouldering in his mind, and he reflected that it was time for him to imitate the example of other leaders of his sect by undertaking a crusade against indiscriminate divorce. Appalled as he was by the behavior of his friend's daughter, he reverted—but not aloud—to

his previous opinion that it had been a godless marriage. Hence there was less occasion for surprise, and the instance in question lost some of its pathos as a consequence. But it provided him with a terrible incentive for saving others from the pitfall which had engulfed this self-sufficient and worldly minded young woman. His zeal communicated itself to Mrs. Wilson—for he did not fail in due manifestation of personal sympathy—and when he left her at the end of a visit of two hours her favorite impulse toward social reform was already acting as a palliative to her anguish and disappointment as a mother.

A few days later her brother informed her that Paul's wife had refused to wait the three years necessary to entitle the one or other of them to institute dignified divorce proceedings, on the ground of desertion, in the State where her husband had his domicile, and that she had gone to Nebraska to pursue her own remedy. Mr. Howard, though obviously disgusted, finally dismissed the matter with a sweep of his hand, and the utterance, "I guess, on the whole, the sooner he is rid of her the better." But this apothegm, which for a second time did him service, only increased his sister's dejection. The disgrace of the family seemed to stare her in the face more potently than ever. Following within a few weeks of this information came the disclosures in the newspapers of the double divorce with their sensational innuendoes as to what had occurred at Newport. For three days she kept the house, too sick at heart to attempt to simulate in public the veneer of an unruffled countenance. Then she visited Gordon Per-

ry's office, and consulted him as to the feasibility of putting some legal obstacle in the way of her daughter's procedure; but learned from him, as she had feared, that she was powerless. When she resumed her ordinary avocations she feared lest the shame she felt should mantle her cheek and impair the varnish of well-bred serenity. It was while she was in this frame of mind that she was accosted by Loretta, and the effect of the bald remarks was as though someone had invaded her bosom with a rude cold hand. They froze her to the marrow, and while, on second thought, she ascribed the liberty to ignorance, she felt disappointed at the evolution of her ward. Such lack of delicacy, such inability to appreciate the vested rights of the soul argued ill for Loretta's progress in refinement. There was no second invasion of Mrs. Wilson's privacy. It seemed to her, as the days passed, that she had been through a crushing illness, and she felt the mental lassitude of slow convalescence. The receipt of Mrs. Stuart's brief letter informing her that she had been injured and was in need of counsel was a sudden reminder that she had allowed her personal sorrow to render her selfishly heedless of all else. It served as the needed tonic to her system. She swept away the cobwebs of depression from her brain, and with a firm purpose to resume her place in the world despatched forthwith a sympathetic note and two bunches of choice grapes to the invalid, and on the following morning gave orders to her coachman to drive her to Lincoln Chambers.

XX

THE sight of Constance's colored glasses stirred Mrs. Wilson's sensibilities, already on edge.

"You poor child!" she exclaimed, advancing with emotional eagerness, as the culmination of which she drew the young woman toward her and kissed her. This was a touch of bounty beyond Mrs. Wilson's ordinary reserve, but in bestowing it she was conscious that the recipient had deserved it, and consequently she was pleased at having yielded to the impulse. Besides having noticed with satisfaction the gradual change in Constance's appearance—both her increasing comeliness and tasteful adaptiveness in respect to dress—it distressed her that her ward's charm should be marred by so unæsthetic an accompaniment.

"What does this mean? What grisly thing has happened?"

Constance was touched by the embrace. She had passed a sleepless night confronting her exciting problem. Already this morning she had listened to the passages in those chapters of the first three gospels, Matthew xix, Mark x and Luke xvi, in which are set forth Christ's doctrine concerning divorce and remarriage. As soon as the children had gone to school, she had taken her concordance of the Bible from the shelf, and heedless of Mrs. Harrity's wonder, had pressed the old

woman into service to find and read to her the texts in question. Constance had not considered these for years, and had only a general remembrance of their phraseology, but in the watches of the night her thoughts had turned to them as traditional spiritual sign-posts with which she must familiarize herself forthwith. Just before Mrs. Wilson's entrance she had taken up her broom, hoping that, while she performed her necessary housework, she might thresh out the truth from her bundle of doubts. What if the truth meant the sacrifice of bright, alluring prospects for her children, and of her own new, great happiness? Could it then be the truth? More than ever did she feel the need of counsel and sympathy. At the appearance of her benefactress her pulses bounded, and the appeal in her glad greeting doubtless gave a cue to the visitor's initiative. The gracious kiss on her cheek, so unexpected and so grateful, added the finishing touch to her overstrained nerves, and she burst into tears.

Mrs. Wilson folded her in her arms and encouraged her to sob. Such philanthropy seemed to bless the giver no less than the receiver. She had arrived in the nick of time to be of service.

"There, there," she said, "you are suffering; you should be in bed. You must tell me presently everything, and I will send my own doctor to prescribe for you." So, presuming the cause of this distress, she stroked the back of Constance's hair and held her soothingly.

For some moments Constance made no attempt to check her convulsive mood, but with her head bowed on the friendly shoulder wept hysterically.

When the reaction came she drew back dismayed at having lost her self-control, and as she wiped away her tears and hastily regained her ordinary dignity of spirit, exclaimed, "It isn't that. I have been in bed—I had a fall in the street; but I am quite strong again except for my eyes. I am forbidden to use them for six months. But otherwise I am as well as ever. And I have had a competent doctor."

"Not use your eyes for six months?"

There was incredulity no less than horror in Mrs. Wilson's tone. Constance was herself again by this time. She made her visitor sit down, and she succinctly described the circumstances of the accident and the specialist's examination, so that the authenticity of his verdict and the reality of her predicament were patent. Mrs. Wilson rose gladly and promptly to what seemed to her the occasion.

"You poor child. It is cruel—disastrous. But give yourself no concern. I shall claim my prerogative as a warm friend to see that you and yours do not suffer until the time when you are able to resume your regular work. Your employer, Mr. Perry, what has he said to this? His necessities oblige him to let you go, I dare say."

"On the contrary, he has been kindness itself. He wished me to remain; he would have invented occupation for me. Then I wrote to you and Mr. Prentiss. It occurred to me that you might think of something genuine which I could do for a living until I could use my eyes." Constance paused. Her heart was in her mouth again at the approach of the impending revelation.

"Leave it all to me. There will not be the slightest difficulty. I will find just the thing." Then, suspecting that Constance's troubled look was due to suspicion of this blithe generality, Mrs. Wilson bent forward and added beseechingly, "You will let me help you this time, won't you?"

"Indeed I will—if—if you wish," answered Constance with a sweet smile. So at this heart-to-heart appeal she stripped herself of her pride as of a superfluous garment and cast it from her. Then she said, "You don't understand. Everything has changed since I wrote to you yesterday afternoon. I need your help, your advice, Mrs. Wilson, more than I ever needed it before. You do not know how thankful I was when I saw you at the door. I have been trying to bring myself to the point ever since. I think I can talk composedly now. Last evening my employer, Mr. Gordon Perry, asked me to become his wife."

The instinctive thrill which the disclosure of unsuspected romance inspires in every woman seized Mrs. Wilson, and with it swift realization of what a piece of good fortune from every point of view had befallen her deserving ward. Constance's tears and need for counsel suggested but one thing, a situation old as the hills, but like them always interesting. Jumping at this hypothesis, Mrs. Wilson, eager to show that she had comprehended in a flash, responded, "And you do not love him?"

"That is the pity of it; I love him with all my heart."

Then Mrs. Wilson remembered. She had been

so accustomed to think of Constance as alone in the world, that in the first glow of interest she had overlooked the crucial fact in the case. The recollection of it was disconcerting in a double sense, for she suddenly found herself confronting the same dire problem from the haunting consideration of which she had just emerged. But though her first resulting emotion was similar to that which one feels at re-encountering an obnoxious acquaintance, from whom one has escaped, that which followed was a sense of contrast between the two points of view presented by the separate situations, which culminated in the animating thought that here at last was a soul alive to its own responsibilities. Meanwhile she heard Constance say by way of interpretation:

"My husband is still living so far as I know, and I have never been divorced from him."

Mrs. Wilson put up her hand. "I know, I know, my dear. Pardon the momentary lapse. I am entirely aware of your circumstances. And there is no need, Constance, to explain anything. Believe me, I appreciate all; I understand the meaning of your agitation, I recognize the luminous reality of the issue with which you have been brought face to face."

Constance drew a deep breath. It was a relief to her to be spared preliminaries and to pass directly to the vital question.

"It would mean so much for my children."

To Mrs. Wilson's ear the simple words were imbued with a plaintive but courageous sadness, suggesting that the speaker was already conscious that this plea for her own flesh and blood, al-

though the most convincing she could utter, fell short of justification.

"It would."

Constance ignored if she observed the laconic intensity of the acquiescence. She was bent on setting forth the argument with more color, so she continued:

"If I become Mr. Perry's wife, my children's future is assured. My son will be able to acquire a thorough education in art; my daughter, instead of being obliged to earn her living before she is mature, will have leisure to cultivate refinement. They would become members of a different social class. I need not explain to you, Mrs. Wilson, for it is from you that I have learned the value and the power of beauty. I covet for them the chance to gain appreciation of what is inspiring and beautiful in life, so that they need not be handicapped by ignorance as I have been."

No other appeal so well adapted to engage her listener's sympathies could have been devised by a practical schemer. And the obvious ingenuousness of the almost naïve statement increased the force of it, for like the woman herself the plea stood out in simple relief impressive through its very lack of circumlocution and sophistry. Except for the church's ban a new marriage seemed the most desirable—the most natural thing for this sympathetic woman in the heyday of feminine maturity and usefulness. Mrs. Wilson felt the blood rush to her face as the currents of religious and æsthetic interest collided. Her brain was staggered for a moment.

"Oh, yes. I am sure you do," she murmured. "But——"

Her utterance was largely mechanical and the pause betrayed the temporary equilibrium of contending forces. But Constance received the qualifying conjunction as a warning note.

"There is a 'but,' an unequivocal 'but.' That is why I wish to consult you. I need your help. There is something more to add, though, first. Marriage with Gordon Perry would freshen, sweeten my life, and make a new woman of me. He is the finest man I have ever known." She spoke the last sentence with heightend emphasis, plainly glorying in the avowal. "The simple question is, must I—is it my duty, to renounce all this? I ask you to tell me the truth."

"The truth?" Mrs. Wilson echoed the words still in a maze. Yet the clew was already in her grasp, and she delayed following it only because the greatness of the responsibility, precious as it was to her, kept her senses vibrant. At length she said with emotion:

"This is a strange coincidence, Constance. I have been face to face with this same issue for the past fortnight. My daughter has begun divorce proceedings against her husband in order to marry again. They simply were tired of each other; that is the true, flippant reason they are separating. Each is to marry someone else. Her light view of the marriage relation has almost broken my heart. And what is to blame? The low standard of society in respect to the sacredness of the marriage tie. I endeavored with all my soul to dissuade her, but in vain. I come from her to you.

The circumstances of your two lives are very different, but is not the principle involved the same? My dear, if Lucille—my daughter—could have seen the question as you see it, I should have been a happy mother. You ask my opinion. I recognize the solemnity of the trust. A blissful future is before you if you marry, welfare for your children and yourself. But in the other scale of the balance are the eternal verities, the duty one owes to society, the fealty one owes to Christ. You spoke of beauty. The most beautiful life of all is that which embraces renunciation for a great cause, even at the cost of the most alluring human joys and privileges."

Gaining in fluency as she proceeded, because more and more enamoured of the cruel necessity of the sacrifice, Mrs. Wilson poured into these concluding words all the intensity of her nature. She would gladly have fallen on her knees and joined in ecstatic prayer with the victim had the demeanor of the latter given her the chance. Her heart was full of admiration and of pity for Constance and also of solicitude for the triumph of a human soul in behalf of an ideality which was at the same time the highest social wisdom. If for a moment her modern mind had revolted at the sternness of the sacrifice demanded, she was now spellbound by the shibboleth which meditation on her late experience had reaffirmed on her lips as a rallying cry, the safety of the home.

"You cannot be ignorant," she exclaimed in another burst of expression, "that the stability of the family—the greatest safeguard of civilization—is threatened. What is the happiness of

the individual compared with the welfare of all? In this day of easy divorces and quick remarriages is it not your duty to heed the teaching of the Christian Church, which stands as the champion of the sacrament of marriage?"

Constance's mien during the delivery of this exhortation suggested that of a prisoner of war listening to sentence of death, one who yearned to live, but who was trying already to derive comfort from the consequent glory; yet a prisoner, too, who clung to life and who was not prepared to accept his doom, however splendid, without exhausting every possibility of escape. Though her face reflected spiritual appreciation of the great opportunity for service held out to her, and her nostrils quivered, her almost dauntless and obviously critical brow offered no encouragement to Mrs. Wilson's hope of a tumultuous quick surrender. She listened, weighing impartially the value of every word. But suddenly at the final sentences she quivered, as though they had pierced the armor of her suspended judgment, and inflicted a mortal wound.

"Would the church demand it absolutely?" she asked after a moment.

"Our church forbids remarriage except in case of divorce for adultery granted to the innocent party. The language of Christ in the gospel of Matthew seems to sanction this exception, contrary to His teaching as expressed in the other gospels. But there are many who maintain with the Roman Catholic Church that the marriage tie can be dissolved only by death."

"I know. I had them read to me this morning."

Though Mrs. Wilson regarded herself as a liberal constructionist of scriptural texts, and as in sympathy with the priests of her faith who glossed over or ignored biblical language justifying outworn philosophy, she was glad now of the support of the letter of the Christian law for the great social principal involved. Divining by intuition what was working in the struggler's mind, and ever on the watch to satisfy her own standard as regards modern progressiveness of vision, she ventured this:

"Though the words of Christ seem far away—though His world was very different from ours, as perhaps you were thinking, the human needs of to-day are a grand and unanswerable vindication of His teachings and of the church's canon."

Constance looked up wonderingly. Was she dealing with a seer?

"I was thinking that very thing, that the Saviour's words seem so far away, perhaps He did not anticipate such a case as mine."

"He invites you to suffer for His sake even as He did for yours."

Mrs. Wilson had heard the doctrine of the atonement criticised as outworn, and she was by no means sure in her heart that it would survive the processes of religious evolution; yet she felt no scruples in proffering this cup of inspiration to a thirsty and not altogether sophisticated spirit.

Constance's lip trembled. "I neglected once to heed the voice of the church. I strayed away from Christ. When I was in trouble the church sought me out, helped me and took me back."

"I remember. Mr. Prentiss has told me."

"Would Mr. Prentiss consent to marry me?"

"He could not perform the service; he is forbidden. You could be married only by some clergyman of another sect, if one would consent, or before a justice of the peace."

It was evident from her tone that Mrs. Wilson classed the civil ceremony with the ugly things of life.

"I see," said Constance. "I feared that he would not—that he could not." She sat for some moments with her hands clasped before her staring at destiny. Then spurred by one of the voices of protest she cried like one deploring an inevitable deed, "Gordon will not understand. He will deem that I am flying in the face of reason and sacrificing our and the children's happiness to a delusion. He is a sane and conscientious man. He strives to do what is right. Is it common sense that I must give him up?" she asked almost fiercely.

Mrs. Wilson recognized the cry as the fluttering of a spirit resolved to conquer temptation. "To satisfy common sense would not satisfy you, Constance," she answered with gentle fervor. "What you desire would be selfish; what the church invites you to do for the sake of the world, of the family, would be spiritual."

"I wish to do what is right this time at any cost."

As Constance spoke there was a knock, and a moment later the rector of St. Stephen's appeared in the doorway, a large, impressive figure. For an instant he stood looking to right and left, taking in the surroundings while the two women

rose to greet him, and Mrs. Wilson uttered an eager aside to Constance:

"Here is someone who will tell you what is right."

Perhaps she did not intend to smother the remark. At all events it was overheard by Mr. Prentiss, and it suggested to him an appropriate greeting.

"I know of few better qualified to decide for herself what is right than Mrs. Stuart," he exclaimed with sonorous geniality, advancing. "I received your letter, and here I am. I am glad to see that another friend has been even more prompt," he added, shaking hands with Mrs. Wilson.

"Yes, I wrote to you both that I had been ill because I felt sure that you would be willing to advise with me as to my future," said Constance.

She endeavored to take the clergyman's silk hat, but he urbanely waved her back, and, depositing it on the table, threw open his long coat, and squaring himself in the chair offered him glanced around the somewhat darkened room.

"Well," he said, with cheery solicitude, "you must tell me your story."

"Let me explain, my dear," interposed Mrs. Wilson, and thereupon she glided from her chair, and seating herself on the sofa beside Constance, proceeded to enlighten him. "Our young friend has had a painful accident," she began, and in half a dozen graphic sentences she informed Mr. Prentiss of the details of the catastrophe and the scope of the injury. Meanwhile she possessed herself of Constance's hand, and from time to time pat-

ted it softly during the narration, in the course of which the rector on his part expressed appropriate concern for the victim.

"When Mrs. Stuart wrote," she continued, "it was in order to consult us as to how she might best earn her livelihood until such time as her eyesight is restored. This was a pressing and delicate consideration for the reason that she suspected her employer of a design to invent occupation for her relief, which under all the circumstances was distasteful to her pride. The particular matter of providing her with suitable means of support I have taken upon myself, and the question is no longer perplexing her. It has been put in the shade by another and far more momentous problem, the solution of which we have been discussing for the last half hour. You come just in time to give her the benefit of your abundant insight and experience. Since she wrote to you an unexpected and appealing event has come to pass. Mrs. Stuart has received an offer of marriage from Mr. Perry, her employer, who of course is aware that she still has a husband living from whom she has never been divorced."

Mrs. Wilson designedly threw this searchlight upon the past history of her ward in order to save her rector from the possibility of finding himself in the same slough into which she had slipped as a result of inadvertence, and also to place the precise situation before him in one vivid flash.

Presumably what he had heard was a stirring surprise to Mr. Prentiss, but versed in receiving confessions he gave no sign of perturbation beyond compressing his lips and settling himself further

back in his chair like one seeking to get his grip on an interesting theme. When Mrs. Wilson in bright-eyed consciousness of having sprung a sensation waited to enjoy its effect, he nodded, as much as to inform her that he had grasped the facts and that she might proceed.

She fondled Constance's hand for a little before doing so. She wished to come to the point directly, yet exhaustively; to avoid non-essentials, yet to present the theme with picturesqueness.

"This little woman's heart is deeply engaged," she resumed. "She loves dearly the man who has offered himself to her. His wish to make her his wife is not only a precious compliment, but it holds forth interesting opportunities for happiness and advancement for her and for her two children. He is, as you know, a man of high standing in the community with prospects of distinction. From the point of view of worldly blessedness the offer is exceptionally alluring. Moreover she would be a wife of whom he could be justly proud. You see what I mean. I have given you, I think, all the vital data which bear on the case." As she paused she noticed that Constance stirred beside her. It had not been her intention to proceed further, but she made this clear by saying, "I leave the rest for you, my dear."

The next moment the rector responded with grave, solicitous emphasis. "I believe that I recognize precisely the circumstances with all the inseparable perplexities and pathos."

By an involuntary restless movement Constance had indeed revealed her dread that Mrs. Wilson was about to state the arguments as well as the

point at issue, and her spirit had risen in protest. For sitting there intent on every word she had had time to realize that a crucial moment in her life had arrived, and that no one else however clever could fitly express what was working in her mind in defence of her lover's cause. When now the desired chance to speak was afforded her there was no hesitation; the necessary burning question was on her lips—the one question which demanded an unequivocal answer.

"Mrs. Wilson has stated all the facts. I ask you, Mr. Prentiss, to tell me truly if it is possible for me to marry Mr. Perry without doing wrong, without doing what you—the church—would not have me do. I am ready to renounce this great happiness if it would not be right in the highest sense for me to become his wife."

It was the rector's turn to stir uneasily. His soul was rampant over the horrors of the divorce evil, but his humanity was momentarily touched by the rigor of this particular case. He, too, had had time to think, and his opinion was already formed. It had indeed arisen spontaneously from the depths of his inner consciousness as the only possible answer. Yet as a wrestler with modern social problems he was disturbed to perceive that this sacrifice on this petitioner's part would have the surface effect of a hardship which, however salutary as a tenet of Christian doctrine, was not altogether satisfactory from the practical standpoint. Consequently his reply was a trifle militant.

"Have you as a woman considered whether remarriage while your husband is alive would be consistent with the highest feminine purity?"

It was a specious attack, but for a moment Constance did not comprehend. Then when it came over her that he was imposing chastity upon her, and expressing surprise at her restlessness, she lowered her eyes instinctively. That phase of the case had occurred to her many times already. Was it an impurity that she, with a husband living, should love another man? Was the implied reproach sound? Her feminine self-respect was dearer to her than life. Yet she had not discussed the point with Mrs. Wilson, as exploration with the plummet of conscience of the recesses of her womanly self had left her without a qualm. She had even faced the repugnant possibility that, as the wife of Gordon, she might hereafter be brought in contact with Emil, and decided that it could not become a controlling bugbear. Yet now when she raised her eyes again she looked first at her mentor. That lady had hers turned toward the ceiling in rapt meditation, but becoming conscious of Constance's glance, she lowered them to meet it, and Constance gathered from their troubled appeal that she agreed with the clergyman that remarriage for her would be incompatible with the highest personal delicacy and a breach of the law of beauty. This was almost a shock, and increased her trouble. Her reason was still unconvinced that the objection was other than an affectation, but the joint disapproval was a challenge to her confidence. Still she answered with the courage of her convictions:

"I should like to marry because I am in love. If my husband were dead, it would not seem inappropriate that I should wed another."

"You are well provided for; you have employment and are earning a decent livelihood. You have friends who will see that your children do not lack opportunities for advancement. Is not that enough?" He paused and quoted rhetorically: "Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh."

Constance broke the silence by completing the passage with reverence, "What therefore God hath joined together let not man put asunder."

"Precisely," murmured the rector.

Constance slipped her hand from Mrs. Wilson's and rose to her feet. Why, she scarcely knew. She felt the impulse to stand before her judges, even as a petitioner at a court of final resort. Though her heart was hungry for permission to enter the land of promise, she already guessed what the verdict would be. If her rector's hint that the project ought to have jarred upon her finer feminine instincts had left her unconvicted before the tribunal of her own wits, it had set her thinking. It had brought before her a retrospective vision of the long fealty of her sex to the voice of carnal purity, and its twin sister, woman's long fealty to the church. She must be true to her birthright as a woman; she must obey the higher law whatever the cost. No happiness could be comparable to that which obedience would bring. Yet another thought held her, and a little doggedly. Whatever her penitence for past error, she had never abdicated her heritage as an American woman—her right to the exercise of free judgment where the interests of her soul were concerned. Her intelligence must be satisfied before

"I should like to marry because I am in love."

she yielded. Yet even as she rallied her energies for a second bout, it seemed to her that the memory of her late forgiveness by the church stood in the guise of an angel at the rector's side with grieving eyes, and the charge of ingratitude on its lips. But Constance said sturdily and carefully:

"I have reread the Bible texts, Mr. Prentiss, and Mrs. Wilson has explained to me that as a priest of the Episcopal Church you could not marry me. I understand that. What I wish you to tell me is whether it would be a sin, a real sin, were I to be married elsewhere. The law allows it, only the church forbids. Has the church no discretion, could no exception be made in a case like mine? In this age of the world it would seem as though justice and the demands which religion makes on the conscience ought to tally. You know the circumstances of my first marriage. Because I made a dreadful mistake, is it my highest duty to renounce this happiness as a forbidden thing? It is for you to tell me. I must trust in you; I cannot decide for myself. My reason whispers to me that it would not be wrong for me to consent, but I am prepared to put this seeming blessing from me if by accepting it I should be guilty of a genuine weakness, should be helping to push society down instead of helping to maintain the standards of the world."

Mr. Prentiss beamed upon her with pitying, gracious approval. Now that he had recovered from his momentary access of temper he beheld in a clear light the reality of the sacrifice, her touching sincerity and his own opportunity. From the standpoint of righteousness there was no room

in his mind for doubt or evasion; yet he felt that it behooved him to meet this spiritual conflict with all the tenderness of his priestly office. He had learned to admire this lithe, dark-haired woman, nor was her greater physical attraction lost on him. He realized as she stood before him that under the new dispensation she had waxed in charm and social effectiveness; and once more she was showing herself worthy of his enthusiasm. His ear had noticed the felicity of her last thought, and he was musing on the sophisticated scope of it when Mrs. Wilson's dulcet voice broke the silence.

"I have made clear to Mrs. Stuart, Mr. Prentiss, that the advanced thought of the church finds in the words of Christ not merely an inspired utterance concerning divorce, but the rallying cry in behalf of a profound, practical, social reform."

The rector bent on his ally a discerning glance of satisfaction. He perceived gratefully that she had made the most of her opportunities to till the soil from which he looked for a rich harvest.

"My dear friend," he said to Constance, "you have put upon me a great responsibility from which I must not shrink. But however uncompromising my duty as a servant of Christ may cause me to appear, believe me that my understanding is not blind to the human distress under which you labor. You are asked to renounce what is for woman the greatest of temporal joys, the love of a deserving man." He paused a moment to mark the fervor of his sympathy. "Were I willing to palter with the truth, and did I deem you to be common clay unable to appreciate and

live up to it, I might say to you 'go and be married elsewhere. It will be an offence; it will not have the sanction of the church; but others have done the same, and you will have the protection of the secular law.' Although the Roman Catholic priest has but one answer under all circumstances however pitiful, 'who, having a husband or wife living, marries again, cannot remain a member of the church,' it might seem permissible to some of my cloth not to condemn remarriage in the case of a dense soul as a grievous sin. But such palliation would sear my lips were I to utter it for your relief. You have asked me what is the vital truth—your highest Christian duty. There can be but one answer. To respect the marriage bond and, keeping yourself unspotted from the world, hold to one husband for your mortal life so long as you both do live. To yield would not be a crime as the ignorant know crime, but it would be a sapping carnal weakness, inconsistent with the spiritual wisdom which has hitherto led you. It would indeed help to lower the standards of human society. I may not equivocate, my dear friend. This is the ideal of the Christian Church in respect to marriage and divorce. Invoke the human law for your protection against your husband if you will, but he is still your husband in the eyes of God, and if you wed another you commit adultery."

Constance, seeming like a breathing statue, save for her odd disfigurement, her arms before her at full length, her hands folded one upon the other, heard her sentence and love's banishment. Already she felt the thrill of a solemn impulse to bear this

cross laid upon her, not as a cross but as a fresh opportunity for service, yet she said:

"Then the law of the church and the law of the State stand opposed to each other!" She spoke in soliloquy as it were, phrasing an existing condition for the explanation of which her intelligence still lacked the key.

Mr. Prentiss drew himself up. "Yes, they stand opposed, as in so many other instances. The law of the State is for the weak; the law of the church —of Christ—is for the strong. Verily the church has been magnanimous and forbearing. It has resigned to the State little by little control of the social machinery. But here, where the foundations of society are at stake, it behooves her to stand firm. The law of spirit is at war with the law of flesh. Monogamy is the corner-stone of Christian civilization."

"And hence it is that marriage is a sacrament; that the marriage bond bears the seal of heaven," added Mrs. Wilson ardently, as the rector, contented with his metaphor, stopped short in his righteous foray.

"If my marriage was made in heaven, we were ill-mated," retorted Constance. The thought seemed so repugnant to her that she revolted at it. But Mr. Prentiss, like a true physician of the soul, was equal to the emergency.

"The choice was yours, and you made a dreadful mistake. Have you yourself not said so? Shall you not pay the penalty, my daughter? You thought you knew him whom you married."

"Oh, yes, indeed; but I was very young."

"May they not all say the same? And yet,"

pursued the rector, in a tone of proselytizing triumph, "the demon of divorce lurks at our firesides and, stalking through every walk of life, makes light of the holy tie as though it were of straw, mocking the solemn associations of the family, and taking from the innocent child the refining and safe-guarding influence of a stable, unsullied home. Yet the State stands by and winks at—aye, connives at and promotes the foul programme, rehabilitating shallowness and vice through the respectable red seal of the law. Yes, there are two standards. As a modern priest I am aware of the sophistry of the criticism, for who, if the church does not, will stand as the protector of the home? And if it sometimes happens, as it must happen," he concluded in an exalted whisper, "that the apparent earthly happiness of one must be sacrificed for the good of the many, I know that you are not the woman to falter."

"Oh, no—oh, no," answered Constance, shaking her head. "It is a terrible condition of affairs, is it not? I see; I understand." She resumed her seat on the sofa and covered her face with her hands. For a few moments there was silence. Mrs. Wilson restrained a melting impulse to put her arm around her ward's shoulder in pitying encouragement. She felt that it was wiser to wait.

"Terrible," repeated Constance, as though she had been dwelling on the thought, and she looked up. Her manner was calm and sweetly determined. "Thank you, Mr. Prentiss—thank you both so much. There is only one thing to do—one thing I wish to do, now that my duty has been

made entirely plain. I shall tell Mr. Perry that though I love him I cannot marry him."

"There is no reason that you should come to a decision on the spot," said Mr. Prentiss, reluctant to take undue advantage of an emotional frame of mind. "Take time to consider the matter."

But Constance shook her head. "That would not help me. I have thought it out already. I could not consent to sin, and you have explained to me that it would be a sin."

"A sin surely; a carnal sin for you, Mrs. Stuart," said the clergyman with doughty firmness.

Constance gave a little nervous laugh—or was it the echo of a shiver? "I had a conviction that it could never be. It was a pleasant dream."

The pathos of the simple utterance reawoke Mrs. Wilson's strained sensibilities. She bent and kissed Constance on the forehead. Then turning to her rector she murmured with reverent ecstasy:

"Will you not pray with us, Mrs. Prentiss?"

It was a grateful, benignant suggestion to the sufferer; the tonic which her yearning, baffled spirit needed. Divining as by telepathy that the moment had arrived for just this spiritual communion, the clergyman set the example to the two women by falling on his knees, and presently his voice was raised in fervent prayer. It was the prayer of praise and victory, not of consolation and distress. He thanked God—as he could do with an overflowing heart—for this triumph of intelligent spiritual discernment over the lures of easygoing and numbing materialism. The out-

come of the occasion was indeed for him an oasis, one of those green, fruitful passages in the more or less general dryness of heart-to-heart contact with his parishioners, the occurrence of which made him surer both of his own professional capacity and of the eternal truths of his religion. His invocation of his God was alike a pæan of thanksgiving and an acknowledgment of rekindled faith. As for Constance, his words were so many cups of water to a thirsty soul. Scorched by his exaltation, the cloud mists of doubt no longer perplexed her, and she beheld with radiant eyes her cross, her privilege to renounce what reason and human passion urged, for the sake of an ideal—the higher, vital needs of the human race.

When Mr. Prentiss had finished Mrs. Wilson did not for a moment trust herself to speak. Her eyes were full of tears. She had knelt as close to Constance as she felt to be harmonious. It was a glorious hour also for her. The steadfastness of this woman of the people was not only a subtle personal tribute, but it had refreshed the tired arteries of her being. When her daughter had left her house, secure and cold in the pride of a revolting scheme of life, it had almost seemed that God mocked her. But now the glories of His grace were manifest.

"Constance," she said, "I will call for you tomorrow, to sit in my pew. It is Sunday, you know."

XXI

IN saying to Constance that he had pondered the question of their marriage from her standpoint, Gordon Perry felt that he had given indeed the fullest weight to every legitimate scruple, and believed that, provided he was beloved, there was no substance in any one of them. He knew that Constance had shrunk from a divorce. What more natural so long as she was undisturbed by her deserting husband? But now that the element of a new, strong affection was introduced, the necessary legal proceedings seemed a paltry bar to her happiness. He had expected that she would demur to the step at first, but he had felt confident that her acute sense would shortly convince her that she was divorced to all intents and purposes already, and that the mere formal adjudication of the fact, however unpleasant sentimentally, was not a valid obstacle. He had also appreciated that this repugnance to a legal dissolution of the marriage tie for the purpose of becoming a second time a wife would be accompanied by an instinctive feminine aversion to giving her person to another man while it was still possible to encounter the original husband in the flesh. He did not pride himself on his knowledge of women, but the attitude suggested itself to him as possible, even probable, in the case of one whose sensibilities were so delicate as hers, for the reason that

there lingered in his mind the remembrance of shrinking words both in books and in real life by other women when the same topic had been broached in the past. Consequently it was a relief to him that Constance did not openly manifest this form of repugnance, and he radiantly jumped to the conclusion that her love for him was so reciprocal and mastering that false delicacy had been shrivelled up as in a furnace. Was not such a process in keeping with her sterling sanity and intelligence? For a moment he had jubilantly assumed that all was won, since, after conscientious if somewhat scornful analysis of the Church's claim, he had already decided that the pure religious objection would never in the end avail to keep them apart. Nor did the foreboding definiteness of her opposition discourage him appreciably. It merely cast a damper on his hopes for an immediate surrender, and indicated to him that he had been premature in supposing that she had been able to purge herself of superstitions and conventional prejudices forthwith. It could simply be a question of time when so human and discerning a bride would come to his arms without a qualm.

Nevertheless he felt that he must convince her. Now that he was sure she loved him, the possibility of losing her was not even to be entertained; but he wished her to succumb as the result of agreement, and not in spite of herself, both because he realized that she would not be happy otherwise, and because the doctrine which she had invoked as a binding obligation jarred not only with his desires, but with his deepest opinions.

Therefore, at the conclusion of their interview, he took up straightway the cudgels of thought in defence of his convictions against what seemed to him the essential injustice and unreasonableness of the Church's claim. This necessarily involved fresh consideration of that claim itself. That night before he went to bed he rehearsed the arguments by which he purposed to appeal to her. Did she not appreciate that they were influenced by no base motives? That neither lust nor undue haste, nor covetous trifling with the feelings of others tarnished their mutual passion. Theirs was no case of putting off the old bonds of matrimony in order to be on with the new, but one where love had been starved to death, and been born again by gradual and chaste processes in a lonely, forsaken heart. What could be wrong in such a union? And were not their own consciences and their own intelligences the only fit judges of the eternal merits?

Gordon Perry's attitude toward religion—toward churches and toward churchmen—was abstractly respectful and friendly. He had been brought up by his mother in her faith, and the period of stress through which most young men pass in early life had been productive of a frame of mind which was reverent as well as critical. Not a small portion of mankind in Benham accepted their religious doctrine on trust, as they did their drinking water. Either they were too busy to question what seemed authority, or that particular compartment of the brain where absorbing interest in the unseen germinates was empty. Some of the most pious never reasoned, and their docile

worship constituted the cement in the walls of dogma. Again, there was a class—a growing class in Benham as elsewhere—composed of well-equipped, active-minded men who were polite to Religion if they met her in the street, and would even go to church now and again to oblige a wife or preserve outward appearances, for they were still of the opinion that religion is good for the masses. But in their secret souls what did they believe?

Gordon belonged to still another class. Religious truth had an absorbing interest for him, but what was religious truth? Different sects—and they were manifold in Benham—told him different things, and each sect proclaimed its doctrine insistently as vital, if not to salvation, to the highest spiritual development. Like many a young man before him, he argued that all could not be right, and as a result he presently found himself a member of that secret society of able-bodied, able-minded male citizens—the largest class of all—who reasoned about religious doctrine somewhat in this way: That they were hopefully looking forward to the time when the controversial differences which divided the sects into rival camps should disappear; and that until then they and their successors, whose number was sure to be legion, would turn deaf ears to the clashing of the divines, and attend church in order to gain strength and inspiration to play their parts well in complex modern human society, ignoring all else but the spirit of Christian love. If it be said that they and Gordon were not strong on dogma, denied that the laws of the universe had ever been

suspended to produce fear or admiration in man, because to believe the contrary seemed to be an insult to God, and looked askance at certain other extraordinary phenomena to which the orthodox cling, it should also be stated that they and he were heartily in sympathy with every effort of all the clergy to improve human nature along intelligent lines, to help the poor to help themselves, to prevent the rich from misappropriating the earth and to foster truth, courage, unselfishness and refinement in the name of religion. Therefore it happened that Gordon was apt to take with a grain of salt what he heard in the pulpit; and now and then he would play golf on Sunday if he were in need of fresh air for his soul; but although he was slightly impatient of clerical sophistries up town, down town he lent a ready hand in the active reforms of the city, in the furtherance of which he had learned to know well, and to admire as good fellows, half a dozen energetic, enthusiastic clergymen. Was not religion one of the great forces of the world? Because one could not believe everything, and revolted at mystical or puerile superstitions, were the highest cravings of one's nature to be allowed to atrophy? So, just as in his social perplexities, he had sought refuge in practical service from the conflict of theories, and on more than one occasion he had been agreeably surprised by the confidential admission of the divines with whom he was co-operating that their and his views were not essentially far apart. Gordon was glad on their account to hear so, and was only the more convinced as a consequence that it was difficult to reconcile most of the strict tenets of the-

ology with the modern ideas of wide-awake, enlightened laymen concerning the workings of the universe or the best social development of the creature man.

Gordon made no attempt to see Constance on the day following his proposal. Impatient as he was to renew his suit, he concluded to let her muse for twenty-four hours on the situation. It occurred to him that he would ask leave to accompany her to church on Sunday morning, but reflecting that it would not be fair to disturb her meditations, he decided instead to attend the service at St. Stephen's and walk home with her after it. Whatever the New Testament language on the subject, would she be able to convince herself that the sundering of such love as theirs would be in keeping with the true spirit of Christianity? It seemed to him that there could be but one answer to this proposition, and as he walked along in the beautiful bracing atmosphere of the autumn day his step was buoyant, for he believed that his happiness would be sealed within a few short hours. Ecstasy ruled his thoughts. Was not the woman of his heart an entrancing prize? Fortune and station she had none, but far more important for him, she was lovable and she was lovely; she was intelligent and she was good.

He had attended service at St. Stephen's once or twice before, and had a bowing acquaintance with Mr. Prentiss; but he knew well and entertained a cordial liking for the latter's assistant, the rector of the Church of the Redeemer, the mission church in the squalid section of the city supported by the larger establishment. St. Stephen's, as the

fashionable Episcopalian church of the community, was apt to draw a large congregation, especially when the pew owners were not confronted by wet skies or sidewalks. This brilliant Sunday at the beginning of the social season had drawn most of the regular congregation and also a large contingent of strangers—chiefly women—some of them visitors in Benham, but the majority students and other temporary residents who found the æsthetic music and devotional ritual of St. Stephen's stimulating. Gordon, who was a little late, obtained a seat in the gallery. It had occurred to him that he would be more likely to catch sight of his ladylove from this eminence than if he remained below. His eyes sought at once the so-called free benches where she was accustomed to sit, but she was not in her usual place. After repeated scrutiny of the rows of faces had convinced him of this, he concluded dejectedly that she had not come. Perhaps she had stayed at home hoping he would call. Or had she been loth to display her glasses in public before she had become accustomed to the disfigurement? His glance wandered over the rich flower garden of autumn bonnets, but to no purpose. While in perplexity he reviewed the probable causes of her absence he became aware that the music of the processional had ceased and that Mr. Prentiss was speaking. Ten minutes later, when the congregation rose to take part in the selection from the Psalms, his glance fell on Mrs. Randolph Wilson in one of the front pews. Her profile was almost in a line with his vision. While he looked his heart gave a bound, for he suddenly recognized that the

young woman next to her in the gay, attractive bonnet was she for the sight of whom his soul was yearning.

After leaving Constance on the day of their eventful interview, Mrs. Wilson had conceived the plan of presenting her with a new bonnet and jacket. These she brought with her to Lincoln Chambers a little before church time, and placed with her own hands on the surprised recipient. Pleased at the æsthetic progress of her ward, she seized this opportunity to promote it, and also to cater to her own generous instincts at a time when to indulge them was not likely to cause offence. Though astonished, Constance accepted without demur these welcome additions to her toilet, and the donor had the satisfaction of beholding how admirably they became her. Besides, Mrs. Wilson had on the tip of her tongue and was eager to communicate the plan which she had been working out since they separated, and which she imparted to Constance as soon as they were in her brougham on the way to church.

"I have been carefully considering your affairs, my dear, and, in the first place, you are to do nothing for the next six months but get well. I shall insist upon looking after you. You promised me, remember." She paused as though she half expected to encounter opposition to this project, and, though her ward revealed no insubordination, she added the argument which she held in reserve: "For, having deprived you by its counsel of the means of support, it is the Church's duty, and my privilege as a disciple of the Church's cause, to watch over you until you are able to provide for

yourself. At the end of the six months, when your eyes are strong again, I wish you to become my private secretary."

On the way from her house she had pictured to herself the astonishment and delight which such an unexpected and splendid proposition must necessarily inspire, and she could not refrain from stealing a sidelong glance at Constance in order to observe the effect it would have on her.

"Your private secretary?"

Mrs. Wilson felt rewarded by the incredulous bewilderment conveyed by the interrogatory, and hastened to explain her benefaction. "It seems almost the interposition of Providence in your behalf," she added. "Last evening—and I was thinking of your noble resolution at the time—my secretary came in to inform me that she was engaged to be married, and to ask me to be on the lookout for someone else. 'The very place for Constance Stuart,' I said to myself at once. 'What could suit her better? And what an admirable arrangement it will be for me!' For, after refusing Mr. Perry's offer, I take for granted that, even when your eyesight is restored, the continuance of your present business relations would be out of the question."

"Oh, yes; entirely so," answered Constance with rueful promptness. "I could not continue in his employment; we should both be unhappy." She was making a confession of what she had been saying to herself all the morning.

"Exactly." Mrs. Wilson beamed over the success of her divination.

"Then we will consider it settled. And I wish

to tell you besides that I shall take it upon myself to see that your boy's artistic gift is given full opportunity for expression, and your daughter thoroughly educated. Your salary, I mean, will be sufficient to enable you to give them proper advantages, for I can see that you will be very useful to me."

She was determined to make plain that virtue in this case was to be its own reward, and that the material losses in the wake of renunciation were rapidly being eliminated. At the same time she wished to conceal a too obviously eleemosynary intent.

"I don't see how anything could be nicer for me. And if you think that I should suit—that I could perform the duties properly—I shall be thankful for the position," answered poor Constance.

She had passed another sleepless night. Fixed as was her conviction that separation from her lover was inevitable, she felt deeply sorry for him if not for herself, and dreaded the impending final interview between them. Despite her spiritual exaltation the consciousness that she was letting slip a great chance for her children still haunted her, in that the future by comparison seemed vague and forbidding. For it had been clear to her from the moment of her decision that under no consideration could she remain in Gordon's office. Therefore, though doubtless her friends would help her, the struggle for a livelihood must be begun again.

Mrs. Wilson's amazing, timely offer lifted a great weight from her heart; by it the question of her future employment was disposed of, and dis-

posed of in a way more congenial to her than any she could have imagined possible. It did indeed seem providential that the vacancy should have occurred at this time, and she realized that the certainty that her children would be protected would nerve her for the necessary ordeal of parting, for now there was only selfishness in her desire for marriage. She longed for it to be over with that she might put away once and forever this great temptation.

The thought that Gordon would probably come for his answer that afternoon was uppermost in her mind during the service; but she was in a mood to respond to the beautiful music, and before Mr. Prentiss gave out the text of the sermon she was already thrilling with the joy of her sacrifice on the altar of faith. She prayed that she might be granted strength to renounce this seeming blessing ungrudgingly and to close her ears to the whispers of regret, and as she joined in the jubilant anthem of rejoicing for a risen Lord it seemed to her that the angel of peace brushed her forehead with the wings of heaven's love. The text was "Except a man be born again he shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." It was a sermon of immortality and hope, and a sermon of the triumph of the spirit over the flesh for the sake of a Christ who had set the great example and conquered self through suffering. It was one of Mr. Prentiss's most happy efforts from the standpoint of orthodoxy, graphic, eloquent, and practical. He set no narrow limits of a creed as the arbiter of truth, but declared that the opportunity to

choose between the path of righteousness and the path of self-sufficiency or self-indulgence was offered to every one in the great struggle of modern life; that he who would follow the blessed Lord and Master must shun as evil that which was injurious to the highest interests of human society and thus hateful to God. As she listened Constance could not doubt that he had her in mind. It seemed to her that more than once his glance rested on her encouragingly and fondly. Her brain was transported with ecstasy and zeal. Her opportunity was at hand, and she would serve Christ and mankind faithfully.

Leaving the church under the spell of the sermon, she became suddenly aware that her lover was beside her and was suggesting that he escort her home. At sight of him her chaperone, scenting danger, led the way sedulously toward the brougham, but in the interval Constance decided to take him at his word. Would it not be the simplest course to explain to him quietly on the street that what he asked her was impossible, and thus avoid the pain of a more intimate parting? Therefore she made her excuses to Mrs. Wilson, pleading the radiance of the day and her need of fresh air. She felt so sure of herself that, though she noticed her friend seemed disappointed, it did not occur to her that it was from concern as to the result of the interview until she heard a whispered "Be firm." Constance turned a resolute face toward her, and by a close pressure of the hand gave the desired assurance, then as the stylish equipage rolled away from the church door, she

stepped to Gordon's side, sadly conscious that this was to be their last walk together.

Three days later, in the evening, Gordon Perry rang at the house of the Rev. George Prentiss, the comfortable looking and architecturally pleasing rectory in the neighborhood of St. Stephen's. A trim maid ushered him into an ante-room where all parochial visitors were first shown, and asked for his name. There was a nondescript elderly woman in black ahead of him. In his capacity as rector of a large parish, Mr. Prentiss followed the modern methods of other busy professional men. An electric bell at his desk notified the servant that the interview with the last comer was at an end and that the next in order was to be introduced. Gordon had not long to wait. His remaining predecessor's stay was brief. The rector's heartiness was almost apologetic as he strode a pace or two forward to greet his visitor.

"Mr. Perry, I am very glad to see you. I am sorry that you should have been kept waiting. But the clergy cannot afford to be unbusiness-like, can they? We intend to live down that taunt. So my rule is 'first come, first served.' "

"The only proper rule, I am sure."

It was a spacious, well-filled room, the manifest workshop of an industrious man, but furnished with an eye to æsthetic appropriateness as well as utility. Red leather chairs and lounges of goodly proportions, two symmetrical, carved tables covered with documents, books, and pamphlets, warm curtains, an open wood fire, a globe, sundry busts and framed photographs of celebrities, mainly clerical, including a large one of Phillips Brooks

and another of Abraham Lincoln, were its distinguishing characteristics.

Mr. Prentiss stepped to one of the tables and opening an oblong Japanese box drew out a handful of cigars.

"Will you smoke, Mr. Perry?" he asked, cheerily.

Gordon took one, and the clergyman, who reserved his use of tobacco for occasions when by so doing he might hope to make clearer that he was human, did the same. As soon as they were lit, Mr. Prentiss with a sweep of his hand indicated two easy chairs on either side of the fire, but after his guest was seated he himself stood with his back to the mantel-piece, his hands behind him, the commanding affable figure of a good fellow. Still he chose to show at the same time what was in his heart at the moment coincident with his manifestations of secular hospitality.

"That woman who just went out has recently buried her only son, the joy and prop of her old age. She came to thank me for a trifling donation I had sent her. Her courage and her trust were beautiful to witness. These humble lives often furnish the most eloquent testimonials of the eternal realities." He spoke with the enthusiasm of his calling, as a doctor or a lawyer might have set before an acquaintance an interesting case. He liked to feel that he was on the same footing with the world of men as they, with respect to privileges no less than responsibilities. For an instant he seemed to muse on the experience, then briskly recurring to the immediate situation said:

"But what can I do for you, Mr. Perry? My

assistant, Mr. Starkworth, tells me that you take an active personal interest in the social problems of our community."

This bland presumption of ignorance as to the cause of his visit made Gordon smile. He could not but suspect that it was artificial. Yet the inquiry was by no means hypocritical; for though Mr. Prentiss was fully conscious of his caller's identity, and had given him a correspondingly genial reception, he regarded the episode of the proposed marriage as so completely closed by Constance's decision that he did not choose to believe that Gordon had come for the unseemly purpose of reviving it. It seemed to him far more probable that his advice or assistance was sought in some humanitarian or civic cause.

"Yes," said Gordon slowly, enjoying the development of the opening which occurred to him, "Mr. Starkworth and I have co-operated from time to time, with mutual liking, I think. It is in regard to a social problem that I have come to consult you this evening."

"Ah," said the rector, relieved in spite of his belief, and thereupon he settled himself in the other capacious easy chair and turned a cordially attentive countenance to his guest. "You may feel assured of my interest in anything of that kind."

"It concerns my own marriage," said Gordon.

The challenge was so unmistakable, like a gauntlet thrown at his feet, that Mr. Prentiss was for an instant disconcerted, then irritated. But the pleasant manner of his opponent negatived the aroused suspicion that effrontery lurked behind this

slightly sardonic introduction, and he met the attack with a grave but supple dignity.

"Indeed," he said. "I shall be very glad to hear what you have to say, Mr. Perry."

XXII

GORDON drew deeply several times at his cigar, then laid it on the bronze tray for ashes within reach, as thought he felt that it might profane his thought.

"I come to you to-night, Mr. Prentiss, as man to man, knowing that you wish truth and justice to prevail, and asking you to believe that I desire the same. We are both of us men of affairs in the modern sense."

The rector bowed.

"Then you as the rector of one of the most influential churches in the city will doubtless agree that religion must be sane and reasonable in its demands to-day or it will lose more followers among the educated—and education is constantly spreading—than it gains from the ignorant and superstitious?"

"Assuredly."

"I, on my side, as a layman—whatever our differences of precise faith and dogma—am glad to bear witness that the present social world could do without true religion less than ever before."

The summary pleased Mr. Prentiss. It was reasonable and progressive. "We are entirely in accord there," he answered heartily.

"As I supposed. Then it obviates the necessity of feeling my way. With some clergymen I

should not venture to take anything unorthodox for granted, but I believed that we should readily find a common ground of agreement."

The assertion was regarded by Mr. Prentiss as a compliment. Nevertheless he perceived that it behooved him to mark the limits of his liberality.

"The essence of Christianity has nothing to fear either from the higher criticism or the modern world's lack of interest in moribund dogma. May I not say with Paul 'but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth to those things which are before'?"

"And from that point of view may I ask why you have felt constrained to separate Mrs. Stuart and me?"

There was a brief pause. The rector had not the remotest intention of shirking responsibility, but he wished the precise truth to appear.

"It was Mrs. Stuart's own decision."

"I asked her in good faith, after an attachment of several years, to become my wife. She loves me fondly, as I do her. She would have married me had you not convinced her that to do so would be a sin."

"I told Mrs. Stuart that from the standpoint of her highest duty as a Christian woman, it would be a sin. Not unpardonable sin, if finite intelligence may venture to distinguish the grades of human error, but conduct incompatible with the highest spirituality—and modern spirituality, Mr. Perry."

There was a doughty ring to the rector's tone, betokening that he was not averse to crossing swords with his visitor.

"Why would it be a sin?"

Mr. Prentiss knocked the ash from his cigar and held up the glowing tip. "Do you not know?" he asked, fixing his gaze squarely on his antagonist, so that he seemed to attack instead of defend.

"Because she has a husband living—a brute of a husband who, after dragging her down, deserted her shamefully; a husband whom she has ceased to love and from whom the law of this community would grant her a divorce."

"Proceed."

"Because the Church has seen fit to stigmatize as evil that which the State sanctions in a matter vitally affecting the earthly happiness of the human sexes."

Waiting briefly to make sure that the indictment was complete, Mr. Prentiss rejoined dryly: "You state the case accurately. My answer is that the Church is merely inculcating the precepts of the Saviour of mankind."

Gordon drew a deep breath. He rejoiced in his opportunity.

"Mr. Prentiss," he said, "you referred just now to the world's lack of interest in moribund dogma; we agreed that the demands of religion to-day must be sane and reasonable. I speak with entire reverence, but I ask whether you honestly believe that the few casual sentences which Christ is reported to have uttered thousands of years ago in Palestine in regard to man's putting away his wife should control complicated modern human society —the Christian civilization of to-day—so as to preclude a pure woman like Mrs. Stuart, under the existing circumstances, from obtaining happiness

for herself and her children by becoming my wife? I ask you as an intelligent human being and a just man if this is your opinion?"

There was no hesitation on the rector's part; on the contrary, firm alacrity.

"It is."

"And yet you know that a large portion of the civilized world ignores the doctrine," answered Gordon, curbing his disappointment. He had not expected to encounter this stone wall.

"I do, to its shame and detriment. The Church is not responsible for that."

"Then your argument rests on the letter of Christ's words?"

"It does and it does not." There was triumph in the rector's voice as he laid emphasis on the qualifying negation. He had hoped to lead his censor to this very point. "Nor does the spiritual objection of the woman who has refused to marry you rest solely on that ground. She is an intelligent person, Mr. Perry. She perceives, as I perceive, that what you ask her to consent to do would be evil for the human race as well as contrary to the teachings of our Lord. There is nothing moribund in that attitude. It is vital, timely righteousness. Mrs. Stuart must have set this double reason before you."

Gordon remembered that she had. In his agitation during their final interview, believing that she was laboring under a neurotic delusion, he had given little heed to her argument. Now, as a lawyer, he perceived the ingenuity of the plea, though he still regarded her as the victim of clerical sophistry. Yet he made no immediate response, and

Mr. Prentiss took advantage of the opportunity to elucidate the situation.

"Mr. Perry, you are led away by the special merits of your own case. I acknowledge the hardship; I grant the pathos of the circumstances. They present the strongest instance which could be cited in justification of remarriage by a divorced person. But there must be more or less innocent victims on the altar of every great principle. The Lord has demanded this service of His handmaid, and, though her heart is wrung, she rejoices in it."

"I see," said Gordon, "and that presents the real issue. Why should the Church usurp the functions of the State? Why in this age of the world should it decide what is best for the human race in a temporal matter, and substitute an arbitrary and inflexible ethical standard of its own for the judgment of organized society?"

Mr. Prentiss's nostrils dilated from the intensity of his kindled zeal. "Why? For two reasons. First, because the Church declines to regard as a temporal matter an abuse which threatens the existence of the family, the corner-stone of Christian civilization; and second, because the State has flagrantly neglected its duty, allowing divorce to run riot through the nation without uniform system or decent limitations. Is the Church to remain tongue-tied when the stability of the holy bond of matrimony has become dependent on the mere whims of either party?"

"I see the force of your position. I will answer you categorically. As to the first reason, it seems to me untenable. As to the second, you accused

me just now of seeing only my side. Let me retaliate, and at the same time suggest that, though you may seem to have a strong case, you do not know the real facts." Gordon, having reached a more dispassionate stage of the argument, remembered his cigar, which he proceeded to relight. But the rector, not accustomed to such colloquial dissent, threw his own in the fireplace and crossed his arms.

"Regarding your first plea in behalf of the Church's interference that the Church does not look on marriage as a temporal concern, let me remind you," continued Gordon, "that marriage is the only matter in the realm of human social affairs where the Church undertakes to nullify by positive ordinance the law of the State—where there is divided authority. In all other social affairs the law of the State is paramount. The Church forbids abstract vices—malice, uncharitableness, lust, selfishness, intemperance, but it does not attempt to define these in terms of human conduct, or to substitute canons for the secular statute book."

"The Church regards marriage as a sacrament."

"The Roman Catholic and the Episcopal. If I may say so, the attitude of both these churches is a foreign influence."

The clergyman drew himself up. "Foreign?"

"Yes, foreign to native American ideas, and I might add foreign to the claims of the first followers of Christianity, for the early Christian Church did not assert the right to perform the marriage ceremony, or to regulate marriage. Its protectorate dates from a later period. But what

I had in mind was that it is antagonistic to the spirit both of our forefathers and their descendants. In the early days of New England the service of marriage was performed not by the minister, but by the magistrate, and marriages by clergymen were forbidden. It was the authority of the State, the commonwealth, the considered judgment of the community which was recognized."

Mr. Prentiss nodded. "You are a Unitarian, I judge."

"I was brought up in the Unitarian faith. Like most American men, I believe in the power of the individual to work out his own salvation."

"But what message have you for a world of sinners?" asked the rector, trenchantly.

"I appreciate the force of your criticism. I am conscious that the weakness of Unitarianism—of individual liberty of conscience—is its coldness, that it does not constantly hold out to the degenerate soul the lure of a new spiritual birth. It is for this reason largely that your Church and the Catholic Church have gained fresh converts in this country and this city. Moreover, those churches have promoted among us picturesqueness, color, and sentiment. But, on the other hand, their spirit is autocratic if not aristocratic, and in their love for the pomp of the ages, in their fealty to the so-called vested rights of civilization, they have little sympathy with the rational, every-day reasoning of republican democracy."

Mr. Prentiss pursed his lips. There was no offence in the speaker's manner or tone which would justify a rebuke; on the contrary, they both

suggested that he was trying to speak dispassionately. But the conclusions stirred the rector's blood, and he tightened his folded arms.

"You seem to forget that the spirit of Christian philanthropy, of the loving brotherhood of man, is the controlling emotional force in the Episcopal—yes, in the Roman Church to-day. You yourself are familiar, for example, with the work of my Mr. Starkworth in the Church of the Redeemer."

"Yes. But neither Church has compassion on the misery of common humanity when to relieve it would conflict with the hard and fast letter of church law. That is where—and notably in this matter of recognizing divorce—the other Protestant churches, the Presbyterian, the Methodist and the Baptist, have been more tolerant. They have refused to insist that it is for the benefit of mankind that, under all circumstances, men and women unhappily married should remain in durance vile without the possibility of escape, or, having escaped, should be condemned by precept to celibacy for the rest of their lives. And these are sects whose creed is based on the essential sinfulness of human nature."

The rector glowered at Gordon for a moment from under his brows. "Then where will you draw the line?" This was Mr. Prentiss's trump card. It expressed his utter weariness with what he regarded as the foul system of conflicting and irresponsible legislation, unceasingly and scandalously availed of.

"That brings us to your second proposition!" exclaimed Gordon. "As to whether the State is

faithless to its duty. Have you a copy of the public laws, Mr. Prentiss?"

"Assuredly." The rector strode across the room and taking down two large volumes from the book-shelf presented them to his visitor. It gratified him to demonstrate by this practical test the broadness of his humanity.

"Do you happen to know the causes for which divorce is granted in this State?"

Mr. Prentiss hesitated. Evidently he had no exact information on the subject, which at this juncture was disconcerting. "For far too many causes; I am sure of that," he replied, stoutly.

"I will read them to you. 'Impotence; adultery; desertion for three years; sentence for felony for two years; confirmed habits of intoxication; extreme cruelty; grossly and wantonly refusing to support wife.' "

The rector listened alertly, hoping to be able to pounce on some conspicuously insufficient provision. Since this did not appear he made a sweeping assertion. "They are all inadequate in my opinion except unfaithfulness to the marriage vow, and I often doubt the wisdom of making an exception there. I am by no means sure that the Roman Church is not right in its refusal to admit the validity of divorce for any cause whatever."

"But what has been the course of history since the Roman Church promulgated its canon at the Council of Trent more than three hundred years ago? The cause of common sense and justice as represented by the State has, in spite of the fierce opposition of the clergy, won victory after victory, until the institution of marriage has been placed

under the control of the secular law on most of the Continent of Europe, and the right to divorce and the right to remarry widely recognized—for instance in France, Germany, Switzerland, Norway, Denmark. In France it's a criminal offence for a priest to perform the religious ceremony of marriage until after the civil ceremony."

"Yes, and it was France which during the days of the revolution permitted divorce at the mere option of either party. And there are signs that we are rapidly imitating that same barbaric laxity in the United States, and in this community."

"And if it were, would it be so much more barbarous a condition than the conservatism of the English law of Church and State, which grants divorce to the man whose wife has been guilty of adultery, but withholds it from a woman unless her husband has been guilty of cruel and abusive treatment into the bargain?"

The rector was touched on another sensitive point. He put out the palm of his hand. "I fail to see the relevancy of your comparison, Mr. Perry. However, the American Episcopal Church is not responsible for the flaws in the details of the English establishment. The two are harmonious and their aims are identical, but we do not follow blindly."

"Yet the American Episcopal Church follows its English parent and the Roman Catholic in maintaining that the woman whose husband is an inveterate drunkard, is convicted of murder or embezzlement, kicks and beats her shamefully, or deserts her utterly in cold blood, is guilty of a crime against heaven and against society if she

breaks the bond and marries again. Progressive democracy in the person of the State is more lenient, more merciful. It refuses to believe that one relentless, arbitrary rule is adapted to the exigencies of human society. It insists that each case should be judged on its merits, and both relief afforded and fresh happiness permitted when justice so demands. Think of the many poor creatures in the lower ranks condemned by your inexorable doctrine to miserable, lonely lives, who might otherwise be happy!"

Mr. Prentiss's brow contracted as though he were a little troubled by the appeal to his sympathy with the toiling mass. "One wearies of this everlasting demand for happiness in this life," he murmured. "Was Christ happy? They are free to disregard the authority of the Church if they see fit," he added. "I for one should not feel justified in refusing the communion to a divorced woman who had remarried."

"But the Catholic Church would and does uniformly; and the high church party in your own church would disapprove of your leniency. The vital point is that both churches and you yourself brand those who disobey as spiritually impure, or at least inferior, a stigma which appalls the best women. And so they are held as in a cruel vice. So you have held her who was to be my wife."

The reversion to the personal equation reminded the rector that this was no academic discussion.

"You have not answered my question yet. Where will you draw the line? Granting for the moment—which I by no means agree to—that gross habits of intoxication, felony, or absolute

desertion are valid grounds for breaking the nuptial bond, let me cite the law to you in turn, Mr. Perry." Thereupon Mr. Prentiss stepped to the shelves again, and running through the pages of a book, discovered presently the data of which he was in search. "What do you think of these reasons?" he asked in a scorching tone. "American grounds of divorce: 'When it shall be made to appear, to the satisfaction and conviction of the court, that the parties cannot live in peace and union together, and that their welfare requires a separation,' Utah; 'Voluntarily living separate for one year,' Wisconsin; 'For any cause that permanently destroys the happiness of the petitioner and defeats the purposes of the marriage relation,' Connecticut; 'For any cause in the discretion of the court,' Kentucky; 'Whenever the judge who hears the cause decrees the case to be within the reason of the law, within the general mischief the law intended to remedy, or within what it may be presumed would have been provided against by the legislature establishing the foregoing cause of divorce, had it foreseen the specific case and found language to meet it without including cases not within the same reason, he shall grant the divorce,' Arizona; and in a host of States, 'One year's absence without reasonable cause.' "

"I told you that you seemed to have a good case," said Gordon, smiling. "But I do not think that you understand the facts, understand the real nature of the abuse, for I heartily agree that an abuse exists even from the standpoint of those who maintain that divorce should be granted on the slenderest grounds. As to the extracts which you

have just read, I judge that the book is not a recent publication."

"I have reason to believe that it is authoritative."

"Undoubtedly it was so at the time. But several of the provisions in question have been repealed and are no longer law."

"Ah," said the rector. "But you cannot deny that it is still the law that a man and woman may be married in one jurisdiction and adjudged guilty of adultery or bigamy in another; that the marriage tie is broken daily on the most frivolous grounds and with the most indecent haste; and that there is wide and revolting discrepancy between the statutes of the several United States."

Gordon nodded. "I cannot deny the substantial accuracy of the indictment."

"Well, sir, how do you justify it? Is not civil society neglecting its duty?"

"I do not justify the defects in some of the legal machinery, and to this extent I agree that society is derelict. But what I wish to make clear is that nearly all the legal grounds for divorce in the several states are just and reasonable—substantially the same as in this State—and that the abuses against which they afford relief are such as render the relation of husband and wife intolerable. There are a few vague and lax exceptions such as you have cited, but they are fast disappearing. The real and the salient evil lies in the looseness of administration sanctioned in some jurisdictions, by means of which collusive divorces are obtained by pretended residents, and close scrutiny of the facts is avoided by the

courts. To permit legal domicile to be acquired by a residence of three months, as in Dakota, is a flagrant invitation to fraud; but that and kindred abuses are defects in the police power, and have only a collateral bearing on the main issue between us, which is whether democracy can ever be induced to reconsider its decision that it is for the best interests of human nature that the innocent wife or husband, to whom a cruel wrong has been done, should be free to break the bond and marry again. There is the real question, Mr. Prentiss. You as a churchman—a foreign churchman I still claim—demand that the woman whose life has been blighted by a husband's brutality, sentenced for heinous crime, abandonment, or degrading abuse of liquor should remain his wife to the end, though he has killed every spark of love in her soul. The Church will never be able to convince the American people or modern democracy that this is spiritual or just."

"And yet a man who has been prohibited by the courts of New York from marrying again has merely to step into New Jersey and his marriage there will be recognized and upheld by the courts of New York. But that you will probably describe as another instance of defect in the police power. The line which you draw is evidently that which any particular body of people—sovereign states I believe they call them—sees fit to establish. The logical outcome of such a theory can only be social chaos. The sanctity of the home is fundamentally imperilled thereby."

"And yet," said Gordon, "the family life of the American people compares favorably with that of

any nation in affection, morality, and happiness. More than three-fourths of the applicants for divorce in the United States are women. They have thrown off the yoke of docile suffering which the convention of the centuries has fastened upon them."

"Some of them," interposed the rector with spirited incisiveness. "The shallow, the self-indulgent, the indelicate, the earthly minded. There are many who are still true to the behests of the spirit," he added significantly. It was doubtless an agreeable reflection to him that the one woman in the world for his antagonist was among the faithful.

"On the contrary, I believe that their number is made up largely of the intelligent, the earnest, and the vitally endowed. Democracy maintains that it is no worse for children to be educated where love or legal freedom exists than where there is thinly concealed hate, contempt, or indifference."

It was obvious that neither had been or would be convinced by the other's argument. Probably each had been well aware of this from the first. Gordon had come warm with what he regarded as the unwarranted injustice of the clergyman's successful interference, unable to credit the belief that it would not be withdrawn when the case was coolly laid before him. On his part Mr. Prentiss had listened indulgently, certain of the deep-rooted quality of his convictions, but willing to hear the opposite side stated by a trained antagonist. He had been glad of an opportunity to elucidate the Church's attitude, and had not been without hopes

of making cogent to this censor of different faith the civilizing righteousness of the ecclesiastical stand, or at any rate—which would be in the line of progress—the demoralizing insufficiency of the current secular reasons for divorce. Apparently he had failed in both, and moreover had encountered a disposition toward obnoxious radicalism which was disturbing.

"Then I am to presume that you, and so far as you are at liberty to speak for them, the American people" (Mr. Prentiss could be subtly biting when the occasion demanded), "sanction practically indiscriminate divorce?"

Gordon disregarded the sarcastic note. The bare question itself was sufficiently interesting.

"It is true, as you suggested just now, that the American people have gone further in that direction than any other except the French. In France, after the latitude of optional divorce palled, divorce was abolished and was never authorized again, as you may remember, until very recently —1884. In the exuberance of our enthusiasm for personal liberty the legislators in some of our states—especially those of the most recent origin, have shown an inclination to pass laws which justify your conclusion. But there is at present a reaction. The people have become disgusted with the licentious shuffling on and off of the marriage tie by the profligate element of the fashionable rich through temporary residence and collusive proceedings in other states. You and I have a recent flagrant instance in this city in mind. Every good citizen abhors such behavior, Mr. Prentiss. But the public conscience has become aroused, and

steps are being taken to reform what I termed the defects in the police power, partly by amendment of the loose provisions by some of the offending states, and partly by provisions in other states, challenging the jurisdictional validity of foreign divorces granted to their own citizens on paltry grounds. It is a misfortune that a national divorce law is only among the remote possibilities. And yet, can there be any doubt that any uniform law which the American people would consent to adopt would necessarily include every one of the grounds already law in this State, and which the Church labels as inadequate?"

Mr. Prentiss twisted in his chair. "If the Church were satisfied that the State was sincere, a reasonable compromise might not be impossible. Some of our thoughtful clergy have been feeling their way toward this."

Gordon shook his head. "But even your Church would yield so little; and the Roman Catholic nothing at all. Would you consent to divorce for gross drunkenness or conviction for felony?"

"If so, what becomes of the spiritual obligation that one takes the other for better or for worse? Shall a woman desert her husband in misery? Is long-suffering devotion to become antiquated?"

"As an obligation, yes. If she loves him still, she will cling to him. But if their natures are totally at variance, if she has been cruelly wronged and disappointed by his conduct, she should have the right to leave him and to wed again. The world of men and women has ceased to believe that individual happiness should be sacrificed until death to the cruel or degenerate vices of another."

"The doctrine of selfish individualism," murmured the rector.

"Mrs. Stuart informed me that you made that cry the basis of your objection. I agree with you that individualism has in many directions been given too free scope, and that modern social science is right in demanding that it should be curbed for the common good. But only when it *is* for the common good, Mr. Prentiss. Divorce and remarriage are in many instances necessary for the welfare of humanity, for the protection and relief of the suffering and virtuous and the joyous refreshment of maimed, tired lives."

"And how liable they are to become tired with such easy avenues of escape!" Mr. Prentiss hastened to exclaim. "So long as remarriage is stigmatized as a lapse from spiritual grace, young couples will be patient and long-suffering. The truest love is often the fruit of mutual forbearance during the early years of wedlock. It is only one step from what you demand to divorce for general incompatibility. I have yet to hear you disclaim belief that this would be for the common good, Mr. Perry." Mr. Prentiss rolled out the phrase "general incompatibility" with fierce gusto, as though he were scornfully revelling in its felicity as an epitome of his opponent's theory carried to its logical conclusion. He had been sparring for wind, waiting for an opening as it were, and feeling that he had found it, he forced the fighting.

"It is difficult to forecast what is to be the future evolution of the divorce problem," answered Gordon, reflectively. "On one side is the security of the home, as you have indicated, on the other the

claims of justice and happiness. Just now respectable society stands a little aghast—and no wonder—at the scandalous lack of reverence for the marriage tie shown by our new plutocracy——"

"Godless people!" interjected the rector.

"And will doubtless mend its fences for the time being so as to refuse divorce except for genuine tangible wrongs, such as those we have discussed. But if you ask me whether I believe that in the end general incompatibility—meaning thereby total lack of sympathy between husband and wife—will be recognized by human society as a valid and beneficial ground, my answer is that the social drift is that way. It will depend on the attitude of the women. They constitute by far the majority of the applicants for divorce, as you know. If they become convinced that it will not be for the welfare and happiness of themselves and their children to remain tied to men utterly uncongenial, the State probably will give them their liberty. But one thing is certain," he added, "the Church will never be able to fasten again upon the world its arbitrary standard."

Gordon rose as he finished. He felt that the interview was at an end, a drawn battle so far as change of opinion was concerned. But he had chosen to complete his bird's-eye glimpse of the possible future with a definite and pointed prediction.

Mr. Prentiss had listened with astonishment to the speculative suggestion. He had expected a disavowal of the license embodied in his taunt, and a floundering attempt at limitation which he hoped would involve his adversary in an intellectual

quicksand. Up to this point he had fancied Gordon, though he had disagreed with him. But now, as he also rose, he manifested a shade of haughtiness, as though he were dismissing someone who had come perilously near landing himself outside the pale of the respect which one man owes another of the same class. Ignoring the assertion as to the decay of the Church's power, he said:

"Such an evolution as you predict, sir, would undermine the structure of human society."

"It would be more or less revolutionary, certainly," answered Gordon, blandly. The possibility seemed not to have proper terrors for him, which was puzzling to the clergyman, who was loth to regard this well-appearing young man as a sympathizer with radical social doctrines. He stared at Gordon a moment.

"So long as women are as pure and spiritual minded as Mrs. Stuart the laxity which you seem to invite will be out of the question."

Here was an unequivocal reminder to Gordon of the real fruitlessness of his interview. It was in effect a challenge; and he accepted it as such.

"She will yet become my wife."

Mr. Prentiss shook his head. "I have known her longer than you," he asserted proudly.

For a moment there was silence. Issue had been joined in these two sentences, and further speech was superfluous. It was Gordon who relieved the tension, which seemed almost hostile, by putting out his hand.

"Mr. Prentiss," he said, "we disagree utterly, but that is no reason surely why we should not part with amicable respect for each other's differences

of opinion? I know you are actuated solely by the desire to accomplish what you believe to be right."

The manly appeal was instantly reciprocated. The clergyman grasped the outstretched hand and shook it firmly. To agree to disagree gracefully was in keeping with his theories as to the proper attitude of men of affairs.

"Mr. Perry," he said, "I am glad to have made your acquaintance. Believe me, I grieve that the church in my person must stand between you and happiness. If any matter at any time arises where you think I could be of public service, do not hesitate to consult me. I am well aware that we both are laborers in the same vineyard."

Considering that their theological views were nearly as divergent as the poles, and that they were battling for a woman's soul, this was eminently conciliatory and rational on either side.

XXIII

THE parting with Gordon had been exceedingly painful for Constance, but she had not wavered. The circumstance that they were in the street had been a serviceable protection, for it forced upon the interview a restraint which must have been lacking had they been indoors. She was enabled to keep her lover at bay, and to meet his protestations of devotion and dismay with the answer that she had made up her mind. At the outset she had explained to him in a few words that she had become convinced that marriage would be inconsistent with her highest spiritual duty and hence must be renounced. Her responses to his arguments and impetuous questions were brief and substantially a repetition of her plea that it was incumbent on them for the good of civilization to stifle their love. He did most of the talking, she listened, and under the influence of her resolution rebuffed him gently from time to time, trying to make plain to him that separation was inevitable. When they had reached Lincoln Chambers she felt it advisable for both their sakes that he should not enter, but that they should part with as little excitement as possible. Of what avail an emotional scene such as would be sure to take place were she to let him in? So she had bidden him good-by then and there, informing him

that she was to become Mrs. Wilson's secretary. She had permitted herself finally one last hand clasp and the luxury of saying, "May God bless you, Gordon. You have been the truest friend a woman ever had. I wish you might be more. Good-by." Then she had fled, leaving him standing aghast and still refusing to believe that she could be in earnest.

After she was alone she was free to weep, and weep she did, divining, perhaps, that the surest way to drown her grief was to let sorrow have sway for the moment. When she faced life on the morrow, quiet and resolute, she could not help thinking of the Catholic Sisters of Charity whom she was in the habit of seeing on the street, whose faces so constantly suggested that they had dispensed with earthly happiness. But her elastic nature demanded that she should seek earthly happiness still, and she found herself protesting against the thought that her renunciation might sadden the remainder of her life. Was not her sacrifice for the welfare of society? If so, it behooved her to behold in it a real blessing over which she should rejoice. If it were not a cause for congratulation, a real escape from evil, she was simply worshipping a fetich as Gordon had declared. It was no case of preference for spiritual over mundane things, but of a choice of what was best for her as a human being. Hence she ought to find fresh zest in life itself, not wait for future rewards.

So she sought to deaden her senses to every thought or memory of Gordon, and to take up her new life as a quickening privilege. The first thing

to do was to regain the complete use of her eyes, and for this patient idleness during several months would be necessary.

Therefore, without demur, she lived up to her promise to Mrs. Wilson by accepting the funds necessary for her support until such time as she should be able to assume the full duties of her position. Mrs. Wilson made this easier for her by sending her to investigate diverse philanthropic and sociological appeals and employing her on a variety of errands. The present secretary had agreed to remain until Constance could take her place, and was glad to delegate such duties as the latter could perform. Accordingly Constance reported daily for instructions and had the run of the office appropriated to the secretary's use, a pretty room furnished with a convenient but artistic desk, a typewriter and all the paraphernalia for the despatch of a large correspondence. She longed for the day to arrive when this room would be hers, and she could devote herself unreservedly to the furtherance of Mrs. Wilson's wide interests.

One evening, some fortnight after the parting between Constance and Gordon, Loretta came bouncing into Constance's apartment. She had been employed in one place as a nurse during that period, but had completed her engagement the day before. She appeared to be in good spirits, and Constance noticed that she had on a new hat and jacket more gaudy than was her custom, as though she had spent her earnings promptly and freely. Moreover she looked knowing. The cause of this last manifestation was disclosed

when, after a few preliminary greetings, she exclaimed:

"And so you've left Gordon Perry, Esq., Counsellor-at-Law!"

"Yes. It wouldn't have been fair to Mr. Perry to ask him to wait. Besides, Mrs. Wilson has invited me to become her private secretary. Miss Perkins is going to be married."

Loretta cocked her head on one side and winked an eye. She appeared amused by this plausible explanation, which apparently was not news to her.

"I guess somebody else is going to be married too."

Constance felt uncomfortable; she scented mischief. But there was nothing to do but look innocent.

"A litle bird told me to-day that you had only to nod your head to become Mrs. Gordon Perry, Esq." Enjoying the look of confusion which this bold sally evoked, Loretta approached Constance and peered mockingly into her face.

"It's so, isn't it? You're engaged and you can't deny it. I knew it!"

"Nothing of the kind, Loretta," she managed to articulate with decision.

The little bird was evidently Mrs. Harrity. But the charwoman's gossip could only have been conjecture, and of course her inquisitor knew nothing definite.

"Well, it's your own fault if it isn't. From what I hear he's just crazy to get you." Loretta paused a moment; she was ferreting for information. She seized Constance by the shoulders

and fixed her again with her shrewd gaze. "You can't fool me, Constance Stuart. There's something in the wind. I shan't rest until I find out."

Constance noticed that her cheeks were slightly flushed, and her eyes unnaturally bright. Could she have been drinking? Surely not, or her breath would have betrayed her. Doubtless it was only the excitement of deviltry awakened by feminine curiosity. Then it occurred to Constance to tell her. Was it not best to tell her? Loretta would make her life miserable, so she had intimated, if she concealed the truth. And then again, as she was sacrificing her love for a principle, why conceal from this other struggler the vital conclusion she had reached? It might help, or at least stimulate Loretta. She shrank from disclosing her precious secret, but now that she was interrogated, was it not the simplest, the most straightforward course to confess what had happened and explain her reason?

"Sit down, Loretta, and I will tell you."

The girl obeyed, surveying her with an exultant mien. Constance hesitated a moment. It was not easy to begin. "Mr. Perry and I have talked things over. Yes, Loretta, he did ask me to marry him."

Loretta uttered what resembled a whoop of triumph, partly to celebrate her own perspicacity, partly by way of congratulation. "I felt sure of it. I knew he loved you by the way he was carrying on."

"And I loved him, but I'm not going to marry him. We are to see no more of each other for the

present. It would be wrong for me to become his wife."

Loretta stared as though she could not believe her ears. "Wrong? Who says so? You don't mean to tell me you've refused him?"

"Yes," said Constance a little sadly, for the genuineness of the surprise expressed recalled her own perplexity in discerning an adequate reason for the sacrifice.

Loretta gasped. "Well, you are a fool, and no mistake! Refuse a man like that who's crazy to marry you and whom you love! Wrong? What's wrong about it?"

"It's contrary to the law of my church, which forbids a woman who has a husband living from marrying again."

"But he's as good as dead so far as you're concerned," interjected Loretta.

Without heeding this pertinent remark Constance proceeded to state the so-called spiritual objections with succinct fervor. She felt the desire to reiterate aloud their complete potency.

Loretta listened closely, but with obvious bewilderment and disdain. Even now she seemed unable to credit her companion's announcement as genuine.

"If your clergyman won't marry you, get a justice of the peace. That's just as good."

Constance shook her head. "From my point of view remarriage would be sinful—impure."

Loretta leaned back on the lounge where she was sitting and clasped her hands behind her head. She appeared to be at a loss to find words to express her feelings.

"Refuse a man like that who's crazy to marry you!"

"And you mean to tell me that you've let that man go—the man you love and who'd give you a fine home and be a fond husband to you—for such a reason as that?"

"Yes," answered Constance, stanchly.

"Then all I can say is you didn't deserve such luck. He's too good for you."

Loretta's conviction went so deep that she had become grave, and, so to speak, dignified in her language.

"He's too good for any woman I know," Constance felt impelled to assert. "But for both our sakes, all the same, it was my duty not to marry him. Mr. Perry knows my reasons and—and respects them."

Constance had wondered many times what her lover's present emotions were, but she chose to take no less than this for granted.

"If he loves you as much as I guess he does, he must just hate you, Constance Stuart. My! Think of throwing up a chance like that." Then suddenly a thought occurred to Loretta, and leaning forward she asked tensely, "Does *she* know?"

The suggestion of resentment on Gordon's part had been to Constance like a dash of scalding water. The question just put served as a restorative.

"Mrs. Wilson? It was she who advised me to let him go. She agrees with me entirely."

Loretta looked astonished and disappointed; then she frowned.

"Just because you've been married once? Not if you got a divorce?"

"Never, so long as my husband is alive and we are liable to meet in the flesh."

Constance realized that her phraseology had a clerical sound; still she felt that she had a right to the entire arsenal of the church.

"And she believes that too, does she? Believes that it would be wicked for a good looking, hard-working girl, whose husband had left her in the lurch, and may be dead for all she knows or cares, to get a divorce and marry again? And that's the Church? My! but it's the crankiest thing I ever heard. That's the sort of thing which sets the common folk who use their wits against religion. There's no sense in it. She's a widow; would she refuse to marry again if the right man came along?"

"That's different," said Constance, perceiving that an answer was expected.

"And what's the difference? It's all right to be spliced to another man in three months after the breath is out of the first one's body, as some of them do, but impure to marry again so long as the husband who has dragged you round by the hair of your head is liable to drop in. If it comes to that, and marriages are made in heaven, as the clergy say, what do the dead husbands and wives think about second marriages anyway? I'd be real jealous if I were dead."

"The Church has thought it all out and come to the conclusion that it is the best rule for human society."

Constance spoke with hurried emphasis, hoping to terminate the discussion. She did not desire to argue the matter with Loretta; at the same time

she recognized the familiar pertinency of the allusions to dead husbands and wives.

Loretta detected Constance's nervous agitation. "I hate to think it of her," she cried with sudden illumination, "but I believe she has badgered you into it!"

"Nothing of the kind, Loretta. It's my own free choice. Mrs. Wilson simply made clear to me the Church's side."

Loretta sneered. "It's downright cruel, that's what I call it. The Church's side! The Church doesn't recognize divorce, but there's always been ways for the rich—the folk with pull, kings and such—to get the marriages they were tired of pronounced void from the beginning. It was only necessary to show that they had been god-parents to the same child, or were twenty-fifth cousins by affinity, as it's called, or some such tomfoolery. It didn't take Napoleon long when he wished to get rid of Josephine to induce the Catholic Church to declare that they never had been married, though it was a good church wedding before a cardinal. Pshaw! The Church has fooled the people long enough. What we want is justice and common sense."

That same cry for justice, that same appeal to common sense; and from what very different lips! Yet though Constance shrank from the coarseness of the exposition, somehow the naked saliency of the argument was more persuasive than Gordon's subtler plea. Her instinctive compassion for the masses asserted itself. The fact that Loretta should have touched at once the crucial point which Gordon's trained intelligence had emphasized

struck her forcibly. And after all, what was she herself but one of the common people? But she said:

"The scandal in Mrs. Wilson's own family has been the greatest grief and mortification to her."

Loretta bridled. "Yes, and when Mrs. Waldo gets her divorce in South Dakota and comes back married again, won't everybody she cares about receive her just the same? In six months she'll be staying in Benham and her mother'll be inviting all the other multi-millionaires to meet her at a big blow-out; see if she don't." She paused, and her eyes took on a crafty look. "What do you suppose she'd say if I were to go back to my man?"

Constance sat bolt upright from apprehension. Loretta's air of mystery, which was accentuated by a whispering tone, conveyed to her the true import of the intimation. Yet she would not seem to understand.

"What do you mean, Loretta?"

"My man; the father of my child. He was in town the other day. He has found out where I am and has been plaguing me to go back to him."

"Did he ask you to marry him?" asked Constance, seeking that solution.

"That's not what he meant. But I've thought of that too—on baby's account. I guess he would if I were set on it. But we're both doing well single, and—" She stopped and laughed sarcastically—"and supposing we didn't like each other and got divorced, I could never marry anyone else."

"No matter about that now, Loretta. Do you love him still?"

"It's love that makes the world go round. There isn't much else worth living for, I guess." She pursed her lips after this enigmatical answer, then suddenly relaxed them in an impetuous outburst. "One thing's sure, Constance Stuart, *you* don't know what love is or you'd never have sent away Gordon Perry, Esq., Counsellor-at-Law."

"Don't, Loretta," said Constance, imploringly.

"It's true."

"I love him with all my heart. You don't understand."

"Pish! If you'd loved him as a woman loves a man when she does love him, you'd have been married before this. Why, there's times when I feel like going right back to my man, and I'm not what you'd call more than moderately fond of him. If it hadn't been that I didn't want to disappoint her—and you—I'd have done it before this. Now the next time he comes back, I shouldn't wonder if I did." She leaned back again on the sofa with her hands behind her head nodding doggedly, and nursing her intention.

Constance, appalled, went over and sat down beside her. "Oh, but you mustn't, you mustn't! Go to-morrow to see Mrs. Wilson and talk with her. She will give you strength and convince you that unless you marry him such a course would be suicide, a cruel wrong to yourself, dear—you who have done so well."

"I've kept straight chiefly to suit her; but I don't like what she has done to you."

"Please leave me and my affairs out of the question, Loretta. They have nothing to do with your preserving your own self-respect."

"I don't know about that. If she's just like the rest; if that's a sample of the religion and the beauty she prides herself on, I've been fooled, you've been fooled. What's the use of being respectable if, when true love does come, a poor, deserted woman is robbed of it for such a reason as that?"

It surprised Constance that Loretta should take sides so strongly, and she perceived that the girl must have a tenderer feeling for her than she had supposed. This made her all the more anxious to protect her.

"I value your sympathy very much, dear, but it won't help me—it'll only make me dreadfully unhappy if you do wrong."

Loretta looked at her keenly. Then she took out a small phial, similar to that which Constance had observed on another occasion, and swallowed a pellet ostentatiously.

"If you are troubled with the blues these are the things to take. They brace one splendid."

"What are they, Loretta?"

"If you promise to take some right along, I'll tell you." But she evidently was not eager to disclose her secret, for she promptly replaced the phial in her pocket and said, "I'll make a bargain with you, Constance. If you'll marry Gordon Perry, Esq., Counsellor-at-Law, I'll keep straight."

Constance flushed. "But I can't, dear. It's all settled."

"He will come back if you only whistle. You know that."

Constance let her eyes fall. She feared that it was too true. But she could not afford to be pen-

sive. She must be both resolute and resourceful, for the future of this erring sister seemed to be hanging in the balance.

"I can never marry Mr. Perry, Loretta. But——"

"I thought better things of you, Constance. Oh! well then I'll go back to my man."

"If you should do such a thing it would break Mrs. Wilson's heart."

This seemed to Constance in her perplexity the most hopeful appeal, and she was right, for Loretta was obviously impressed by the remark.

"Would it?" she asked. She looked down at her large hands and let them rise and fall in her lap like one nervously touched by sentiment.

"I do not know of anything which would distress her more," continued Constance.

After a moment Loretta said, "He's away now. He won't be on this route again for another four months. So there isn't any danger just yet." She shrugged her shoulders. Then she rose, adding, "I guess I'll go to bed," which was plainly an intimation that this was to be the limit of her present concession.

Constance was relieved, not only that immediate danger was averted, but that the tie which bound Loretta to Mrs. Wilson, however temporarily strained, was still strong and compelling. She rejoiced to think that they were warned, so that they could now keep a closer watch and leave nothing undone to save her from further degeneration. She dismissed the subject by making some inquiries in regard to Loretta's last case. The girl's responses were to the point and brisk,

but she did not resume her seat, and evidently had no intention of remaining. Presently she got as far as the door, where she stood discussing for a few moments with her hand on the knob. When at last she opened it and was in the act of departing, she turned her head and uttered this parting shot, which indicated what was still uppermost in her thoughts:

"I guess that you never really loved Gordon Perry, Esq., Counsellor-at-Law, or you couldn't have done it."

This taunt lingered in Constance's mind, though she denied the impeachment to herself. Was it not indeed true, as Loretta said, that it is love which makes the world go round? Only for the sake of righteousness was she justified as a healthy, breathing woman in stifling this instinct. If Loretta in the future were to marry some one other than the father of her child both the Church and Mrs. Wilson would rejoice because the mere ceremony of marriage had been lacking in the first relation; yet she herself was forbidden to marry the man she loved because she was tied to a faithless husband by the mere husk of marriage.

She saw Loretta but two or three times before her convalescence was complete and she had assumed her duties as Mrs. Wilson's secretary, for Loretta was sent for again shortly, and was only at home in the interval between her engagements. But Constance gave Mrs. Wilson forthwith an inkling of Loretta's state of mind, though she tried to believe that the girl's wanton threat was a mere passing ebullition due to resentment of her reason for refusing Gordon. Nevertheless she did

not altogether like the expression of her eyes; it suggested excitement, and predominance of that boldness which, though typical, had been much in abeyance during the period of her regeneration. She remembered, too, the bottle of pellets, which indicated that she was taking some drug. So, though she could not believe that she was seriously considering such an abhorrent proceeding, she felt it her duty to put Mrs. Wilson on her guard. They both agreed, however, that the culprit must be handled gingerly and not too much made of the occurrence. Accordingly Mrs. Wilson straightway wrote to Loretta, but her letter was a missive of interest and encouragement, not of reproach or alarm. She deplored in it that she had lately seen but little of her ward, owing to the latter's popularity as a nurse, and urged her to call on her at the first opportunity. She sent her also one or two pretty toilet articles for herself and some new frocks for her baby. Constance said nothing, however, to Mrs. Wilson as to Loretta's attitude toward the church regarding remarriage after divorce, for she could not bear to renew the subject with her patroness. It was settled forever, and her spirit craved peace.

XXIV

IT was a great relief to Constance when at last she was once more self-supporting. Her eyes appeared to be as strong as ever, and she found her new work congenial and absorbing. She was not merely Mrs. Wilson's stenographer, but her factotum, expected to exercise a general superintendence over her employer's philanthropic and social concerns, to attend to details, and, through tactful personal interviews, to act as a domestic buffer. The change from the practical severity of a law office, with its dusty shelves of volumes uniformly bound in sheep, its plain furniture and heterogeneous clientage, to her present surroundings was both stimulating and startling. Stimulating because it catered to her yearning for contact with æsthetic influences, to have the run of this superb house and to be brought into daily familiar association with all sorts of lavish expenditure in aid of beautiful effects and beneficent purposes. Startling because the true quality of the luxury aimed at was unknown to her until she became a constant eye-witness. In both Mrs. Wilson's and her brother Carleton Howard's establishments a major-domo presided over the purely domestic relations, engaging the numerous servants, and endeavoring to maintain such a competent staff below stairs as to ensure delicious, superabundant food and neat, noiseless service which

should emulate as far as possible the automatic impersonality of male and female graven images. All the appointments of the house were captivating; the pantry closets bristled with beautiful cut glass and delicate, superbly decorated china; flowers in great profusion and variety were brought three times a week from Carleton Howard's private nurseries to be tastefully arranged by a maid whose special duty it was to attend to this and to see that those not needed for the decoration of the house should be sent to the destinations indicated by Mrs. Wilson through her secretary—hospitals, friends in affliction or with birthdays, and the like. The spacious bathrooms were lined with artistic tiles; electric lights had been adjusted in the chambers so as to provide perfect facilities for reading in bed; once a week an attendant called to wind all the clocks in the house. Mrs. Wilson's personal appetite was not keen, yet exacting. Her breakfast was served in her own room, and, unless she had company, her other meals were apt to be slight in substance, but were invariably of a delicate, distinguished character as regards appearance if not ingredients. Her steward had instructions that the dinner table should be garnished with flowers and the most luscious specimens of the fruits of the season, though she were alone. When she had guests these effects were amplified, and her mind was constantly on the alert to provide novelty for her entertainments. During the first season of Constance's employment, music between the courses—a harpist, a quartette of violinists, an orchestra—happened to be the favorite special feature of her dinner parties.

That first winter Mrs. Wilson had the influenza and went to Florida for a month for recuperation, carrying her secretary with her. The journey was made in Mr. Howard's private car, and the suite which they occupied at the elaborate modern hotel where they stopped was the most select to be obtained. The spectacle at this winter resort for restless multi-millionaires was another bewildering experience for Constance. The display of toilets and diamonds at night in the vast ornate dining-room was dazzling and almost grotesque in its competitive features. Mrs. Wilson preserved her distinction by a rich simplicity of costume. She had left her most striking gowns at home, and she let Constance perceive that her sensibilities took umbrage at this public cockatoo emulation of wealth. She was even conspicuously simple in regard to her food, as though she wished to shun unmistakably being confounded with the conglomeration of socially aspiring patrons, whose antics jarred on her conceptions of beauty. But Constance could not avoid the reflection that profuse, if not prodigal, expenditure was typical of her companion no less than of them, and that the distinction was simply one of taste. What impressed her was that so many people in the land had merely to sign a check to command what they desired, and that the mania for novel and special comforts, and unique or gorgeous possessions was in the air. On their way home Mrs. Wilson spent a few days in New York shopping, having directed Constance to communicate in advance with several dealers whose business it was to dispose of artistic masterpieces. She bought two pictures at a cost

of twenty-five thousand dollars apiece, an antique collar of pearls, and several minor treasures. At the same time she took advantage of the occasion to grant an interview to two persons, a man and a woman, who had solicited her aid in behalf of separate educational charities. To each of these enterprises, after proper consideration, she sent her subscription for five thousand dollars.

Undoubtedly the chief purpose of Mrs. Wilson's stay in New York was to see her daughter. After a three months' residence in South Dakota, Lucille had obtained a divorce on the ground of cruelty, and had promptly married her admirer, Bradbury Nicholson, son of the president of the Chemical Trust. Mrs. Wilson had declined to attend the wedding, which took place in Sioux City three days after the final decree had been entered—a very quiet affair. Lucille had notified her mother that it was to occur, but was not surprised that she did not take the journey. She and her husband had spent four months in Europe to let people get accustomed to the idea that she was no longer Mrs. Clarence Waldo, and recently they had taken up their residence in New York. Her new husband had three millions of his own, and, as Lucille complacently expressed the situation to her mother, society had received them exactly as if nothing had happened.

"I told you how it would be, Mamma," she said. "Everybody understands that Clarence and I were mismated. I am radiantly happy, and, as for your granddaughter, she could not be fonder of Bradbury if he were her own father. He has bought a thousand dollar pony for her. All the

Nicholson connection and my old friends have been giving us dinners, which shows that we can't be disapproved of very strongly."

Lucille certainly looked in the best spirits when she came to see her mother. She was exquisitely dressed, and her equipage, which stood at the door during her visit, was in the height of fastidious fashion. So far as externals were concerned, it was manifest that she was making good her promise to be more conservative and decorous. Mrs. Wilson saw fit to mark her abhorrence of her daughter's course by going to a hotel instead of to Lucille's large house on Fifth Avenue. She was not willing to stay under her new son-in-law's roof, but how could she avoid making his acquaintance and dining with him? A definite breach with her only child was out of the question, as she had previously realized; besides her granddaughter demanded now more than ever her oversight and affection. Consequently on the second day she dined at the new establishment, and consented later to attend a dinner party which was given in her honor, though Lucille kept that compliment from her mother's knowledge until the evening arrived. She had taken pains to secure the most socially distinguished and interesting people of her acquaintance, and the affair was alluded to in the newspapers as one of the most brilliant festivities of the winter. A leopard cannot altogether change its spots, and Lucille's ruling passion was still horses, but she desired to show her mother that she had genuinely improved; so it happened that after the guests had returned to the drawing-room an organ-grinder accompanied by a

pleasing black-eyed young woman, both in fresh, picturesque Italian attire, were ushered in. They proved to be no less than two high-priced artists from the grand opera, who, after a few preliminary capers to keep up the illusion, sang thrilling duets and solos. When they had finished came an additional surprise in that the organ was shown to be partially hollow and to contain a collection of enamelled bonbonières which were passed on trays by the servants among the delighted guests. After the company had gone mother and daughter had an intimate talk, in the course of which Lucille, though making no apologies, volunteered the statement that she in common with half a dozen other women of her acquaintance had decided to go into retirement in one of the church sisterhoods during the period of Lent. She explained that the sisters of her new husband, who had high church sympathies, were preparing to do the same and that the project appealed to her. Mrs. Wilson was electrified. It was on her lips to ask Lucille how she could reconcile this new departure with her hasty second marriage, but she shrank from seeming to discourage what might be an awakening of faith or even of æsthetic vitality in her daughter's heart. Still, though she rejoiced in Lucille's apparent happiness and prosperity, she felt stunned at the failure of Providence to vindicate its own just workings. Much as she desired in the abstract that her daughter should be blessed, how was it that so flagrant a violation of the eternal proprieties could result not merely in worldly advancement, but an attractive home? For there was no denying that Bradbury Nichol-

son was a far more engaging man than his predecessor, and that he and Lucille were at present highly sympathetic in their relations. Would the harmony last? It ought not to, according to spiritual reasoning. And yet on the surface the dire experiment had proved a success and there were indications that permanent domestic joys and stability were likely to be the outcome of what she considered disgrace.

Mrs. Wilson did not condescend to refer to her daughter's immediate past, but when she found that Lucille was brimming over with fresh tidings concerning the other offenders, Clarence Waldo and Paul's wife, she suffered her to unbosom herself. This news was consoling to her from the standpoint of ethical justice. As she already was aware, Mrs. Paul Howard, obdurate in her impatience of delay, had obtained a divorce on the ground of cruelty in Nebraska after six months, the statutory period necessary to acquire residence, and had then married Clarence Waldo. Now rumor reported that the newly wedded couple, who had been spending the present winter in Southern California for the benefit of the second Mrs. Waldo's bronchial tubes, had not hit it off well together, to quote Lucille, and were likely to try again. For according to the stories of people just from Los Angeles she was permitting a Congressman from California, the owner of large silver mines, to dance constant attendance on her, and her husband, quite out of conceit of her to all appearances, was solacing himself with a pretty widow from Connecticut.

"Of course," added Lucille, contemplatively,

"if they really intend to obtain a divorce in order to marry again, it will be convenient for them that they happen to be in California, as that is another of the states where one can acquire a legal residence in six months."

Mrs. Wilson's disgust was tempered by a fierce sense of triumph. She was glad to know the facts, but she did not wish to talk about them, especially as she was far from clear in her mind that there was any logical distinction to be drawn between the conduct of these voluptuaries and that of her own child. She tossed her head as much as to say that she desired to drop the unsavory topic. But Lucille was so far blind to any similarity between the cases, or else so far content with the contrast in results between the two remarriages, that she continued in the same vein, which was pensive rather than critical.

"I am thankful that Paul insisted on keeping Helen as a condition of not opposing his wife's Nebraska libel, for it would have been rather trying for the poor child to get used to three fathers in less than three years."

Mrs. Wilson felt like choking. The unpleasant picture intensified her repulsion; yet she knew that speech would be no relief for she would not find Lucille properly sympathetic. Just at that moment her granddaughter came prancing into the room, and ran to her. Mrs. Wilson clasped her to her breast as a mute outlet for her emotions, for she could not help remembering that this child also had two fathers, and what was the difference but one of degree? Yet here was its mother smiling in her face, seemingly without qualms and

perfectly happy. How was this peace of mind to be reconciled with the eternal fitness of things?

Meanwhile Lucille was saying, "Tell me about Paul, Mamma. How does he take it? What is he doing?"

Mrs. Wilson sighed. "He was terribly cut up, of course," she answered, gravely. "He feels keenly the family disgrace." She paused intentionally to let the words sink in. "Fortunately for him, he has been invited to run for Congress—that is, if he can get the nomination. It seems there are several candidates, but your uncle tells me Paul has the party organization behind him. The caucuses for delegates do not meet until the early autumn, and in the meantime he hopes to make sufficient friends in the district, which includes some of the small outlying country towns as well as certain wards in Benham."

"It would be nice to have Paul at Washington, for he might be able to get the duties taken off so that our trunks wouldn't be examined when we come from Europe. I suppose it will cost him a lot of money to be elected."

"I have not heard so," said her mother, stiffly. Though Mrs. Wilson's statement was true, certain allusions in her presence by Paul and his father had aroused the suspicion in her mind that elaborate plans to secure the necessary number of delegates were already being laid. The use of money to carry elections was a public evil which she heartily deplored, and which she was loth to believe would be tolerated in her own family.

"He can afford it anyway," continued Lucille, disregarding the disclaimer.

Mrs. Wilson changed the subject. "He was also much absorbed when I left in his new automobile."

Lucille clapped her hands. "A red devil?"

"That name describes its appearance admirably. It is the first one of the kind in Benham, and naturally has excited much attention."

"Bradbury has promised me one for a birthday present."

"I have not ridden with Paul yet," said Mrs. Wilson a little wearily, for the enthusiasm elicited appeared to her disproportionate to the theme. "He has invited me once or twice, but somehow the spirit has failed me."

Lucille gasped. "It's the greatest fun on earth, Mamma. They annihilate time and distance, and you feel with the rush and the wind in your face as though you were queen of the earth. If mine runs well we intend to tour through the continent this summer. Fancy speeding from one capital of Europe to another in a few hours!" She paused, then after a moment's reverie continued, as though stating a really interesting sociological conclusion, "I think it possible, Mamma, that if automobiles had been invented earlier, Clarence and I might not have bored each other. Which wouldn't have suited me at all," she added, "for Bradbury is a thousand times nicer."

Mrs. Wilson was painfully conscious that Bradbury was infinitely nicer, which increased the difficulties in the way of replying to this incongruous observation. She decided to ignore it as essentially flippant, and she rose to go. It was the nearest approach to a review of the past which either had made during her stay in New York.

She hoped that Constance would not appreciate how completely Lucille had rehabilitated herself in a worldly sense, and she tried to counteract the effect of the evidence by letting fall a remark now and again to show that the memory of her daughter's conduct was still a thorn in her side. As a mother she could not but be thankful that her daughter was far happier as Mrs. Bradbury Nicholson than she had been as Mrs. Clarence Waldo. At the same time her being so was a blow to the theory that the exchange of one husband for another ought to end and ordinarily does end in misery; or, in other words, that divorced people who marry again should be and are apt to be unhappy. To be sure, it was early to judge, and the happiness might not last; and at best it should be regarded as a sporadic case of contradiction, a merciful exception to the general rule; but she was glad when the day arrived for removing Constance from the sphere of this influence, fearing perhaps some pointed question from her secretary which would invite her to explain how it was that a person who had deserved so little to be happy as Lucille should have found divorce and remarriage a blessing, if the whole proceeding in deserving cases was fundamentally opposed to the social well-being of civilization. As an antidote, Mrs. Wilson took pains to enlighten her as to the rumored depravity of Clarence Waldo and the late Mrs. Howard.

But Constance asked aloud no such question. Yet necessarily she perceived that Lucille was in the best of spirits, and apparently had suffered no

loss of position by her conduct. Constance did not need, however, any reminder from Mrs. Wilson that the late Mrs. Waldo was not a person of the finest sensibilities; moreover she considered the point as definitely settled for herself. Nevertheless as a spectator, if no more, she noted the circumstance that Lucille was already a different woman in consequence of her second marriage, and she detected her reason challenging her conscience with the inquiry which Mrs. Wilson had dreaded, how it appeared that the world would have been better off if Lucille had simply left the husband who had been faithless to her, and remained single instead of marrying. Constance was merely collecting evidence, as it were. All was over between her and Gordon, but as an intelligent, sentient human being she had no intention of playing the ostrich, but insisted on maintaining an open mind.

It was now nearly a year since she had conversed with Gordon. Her sentence had been perpetual banishment from his presence since the fateful Sunday when they had parted. He had written to her that he could not bear to resume the old relation, for now that they knew they had been lovers in disguise, it could not be the old relation. He had declared that the best thing for them both was never to meet, and she had been forced to accept his decision, for he had not been to see her since. Yet he had mitigated the rigor of her punishment, for she chose to regard it as such, by occasional letters, written at irregular intervals, letters which let her know beyond the shadow of a doubt that the love he cherished for

her was strong and deep as ever. He sent her beautiful flowers on Christmas and her birthday, and in writing to her he told her briefly whatever of special interest he had been doing. Precious as these communications were to Constance, she was of several minds as to whether to answer them. Her impulse always was to reply at once, if only that she might draw forth another letter; but sometimes her scruples forced her not to let him see how much she cared and to feign indifference by silence. She knew, as Loretta said, that she had only to whistle and he would come to her, and she felt that it would be cruel to give him the smallest encouragement to believe that she could ever alter her decision. This being so, she argued that he ought to marry; he must forget her and chose someone else. She tried to believe that she would rejoice to hear that he was engaged to another woman, but when her thoughts got running in this channel she was apt to break down and realize that she had been trying to deceive herself. In such moments of revulsion she now and then would throw her scruples to the winds and write him about herself and her doings. On two occasions she had suddenly decided that it was necessary for her to see him again; see him without his seeing her. Consequently she had frequented a spot down-town where she knew he would pass, and each time had been rewarded by a close and unobserved glimpse of his dear features. These glimpses, the letters, and the flowers were the bright shining milestones along the itinerary of her much occupied life. Busy and interested as she was in her employment, it sometimes seemed to

The flowers were the bright, shining milestone.

her that she walked in a trance in the intervals between some word or sign from him.

Delighted as she had been to travel, to see such a diverse panorama of national life as her trip to Florida and New York afforded, she was glad to find herself again at home. She had not heard from Gordon during her absence, and she was eager to see the Benham newspapers again in order to ascertain what he had been doing in his new capacity as a legislator. He had written to her the preceding autumn that he had decided to allow the use of his name as a candidate for the State Assembly, and subsequently he had been elected. Before her departure in the early days of the session, she had kept her eyes and ears on the alert for public mention of him, but had been informed that this was the period for committee conferences and that the opportunity for debate would come after the bills had been framed and were before the house. Constance knew that Gordon had the strong support of the Citizens' Club in his canvass, that Hall Collins, Ernest Bent and others affiliated with that organization had conducted rallies in his behalf, and that he was expected to favor progressive legislation. There were certain philanthropic measures in which Mrs. Wilson was interested also before the Assembly, and Constance had twice already prepared letters from her employer to Gordon in reference to these, which was another slight opportunity for keeping in touch with him.

Shortly after Mrs. Wilson's return from her vacation it happened that Paul invited her again to ride in his automobile. Recalling Lucille's enthusiasm, and having been partial all her life to

new æsthetic sensations, she concluded to test the exhilaration described by those who doted on these machines. The afternoon chosen was one of those days in the early spring when sky and wind combine to simulate the balminess of summer. It was a satisfaction for Paul to have his aunt beside him both because he admired her and because, seeing that he regarded her as what he called a true sport at bottom, he felt confident that she had only to experience the sensation of speed to become an enthusiast like himself. Therefore, he let his red devil show what it could do, in the hope of carrying her by storm. Equipped with suitable wraps and a pair of goggles, Mrs. Wilson found the process of whirling through the country at a breakneck pace, by the mere compression of a lever, a weird and rather magnetic ordeal. These were the adjectives which she employed to express her gratification to her nephew. She was glad to have tried it, but in her secret soul she had grave doubts if it were the sort of thing she liked. Nevertheless she did her best to appear delighted, for she had in mind to drop a few words of warning in Paul's ear to the effect that it was incumbent on men of his class in the community to preserve their self-respect in the matter of electioneering as an example to the country at large. In the intervals when Paul moderated the speed she endeavored to convey to him clearly but not too concretely the substance of her solicitude. She let him realize that she had him and his campaign in mind, but that she did not intend to meddle beyond the limit of emphasizing a principle unless he were to ask

her advice. Paul listened to what she had to say with evident interest, and without interruption. He even let his machine crawl along so as to get the complete benefit of her exposition. When she had set forth her views she turned toward him and said in conclusion, by way of showing that she made no charges but simply desired to put him on his guard:

"Very likely you have thought this all out for yourself and intend to see that every dollar you may use is expended legitimately."

Paul let the automobile come to a halt, and removing his goggles proceeded to wipe off the dust and moisture.

"Aunt Miriam, every word which you've said is gospel truth; but—and it is a large but—if I were to follow your advice to the letter there would not be the slightest possibility of my securing the nomination. I've thought it all out, as you say, and I'd give gladly to charity twice the sum I shall be compelled to spend, if I could only confine my outlay to legitimate expenses, stationery, printing and the hiring of a few halls. I've no objection to explaining to you why I can't, provided I wish to keep in the running. There are three men including myself in this district," he continued, starting the lever, "who are bidding for the nomination. Each of us has a machine, a machine the function of which is to create enthusiasm. Ninety per cent. of the candidates for public office do not inspire enthusiasm; they have to manufacture it. And there are all sorts of ways of doing so; by paying club assessments and equipping torch-light paraders with uniforms; by invading the homes of

horny-handed proletarians and sending tennis or ping-pong sets to their progeny; or by the solider, subtler method of large direct cash payments, which can never be detected, to a certain number of local vampires as expenses for influence, and whose *quid pro quo* is the delivery of the goods at the polls. I have engaged a smooth and highly recommended patriot at a high salary to conduct my canvass. He has told me there will be large expenses. When he asks for money I draw a check and ask no questions—a rank coward's way I admit. I know nothing as to what he does with the money, and so I salve my conscience after a fashion." Paul shrugged his shoulders and applied a little more power to the automobile, while he chanted:

> "Some naturalists observe the flea
> Has smaller fleas on him to prey,
> And these have smaller still to bite 'em,
> And so proceed *ad infinitum*.

"Which means, my dear aunt," he continued, "that when a rich man runs for office a certain proportion of the free-born consider that they are entitled to direct or indirect pickings in return for a vote."

Mrs. Wilson sighed. "But is not the price too high for a free-born citizen to pay? Why exchange private life and the herbs of personal respect for publicity and a stalled ox which is tainted?"

"I've thought occasionally of getting out, but father would be disappointed. I wish to go to Congress myself and the party wishes me to go.

And what would be the result if I retired? One of the other two would win, and I don't throw any large bouquet at myself in stating that I shall make a much more useful and disinterested Congressman than either of them."

Mrs. Wilson shook her head, but at the same time she appreciated the difficulties of the situation. For she herself desired to see her nephew go to Washington. It was one thing to tell him to take a brave stand and refuse to swerve from the path of highest political probity, another to advise him in the midst of the canvass to dismiss his manager and thus invite certain defeat. It sometimes seemed to her that the ways of the world of men were past understanding. She wondered whether, if human affairs were in the hands of women, the rivalry of politics and the competition of commercialism would tolerate the same army of highwaymen who held up would-be decent citizens as successfully and appallingly as Dick Turpin and Claude Duval. She liked to believe that complete purity would reign, and yet the memory of what some women to her knowledge were capable of in the bitterness of club politics served as a caveat to that deduction. Discouraging as Paul's observations were, as bearing on the ethical progress of human nature, and deeply as she deplored the fact that he appeared to be winking at bribery, she recognized that she had shot her bolt, for she was not sufficiently conversant with the different grades of electioneering impropriety to be willing to take on herself the responsibility of imploring him to retire, even if he would consent to do so. But the confession had robbed the day

of much of its beauty for her. She glanced at the little clock in the dashboard, and remembering that she desired to leave a message for her secretary, to whom she had given an afternoon off, she asked Paul if he would return home by way of Lincoln Chambers.

It happened that in turning something went wrong, so that the automobile came to a stop. Paul was obliged to potter over the mechanism a quarter of an hour before he was able to get the better of the infirmity. Somewhat nettled, and eager to make up for lost time and to demonstrate to his companion that in spite of this mishap a red devil was the peer of all vehicles, he forced the pace toward Benham. By the time he was within the city limits his blood was coursing in his veins as the result of the impetus, and he felt on his mettle to amaze the onlookers as he sped swiftly and dexterously through the streets. Gliding from avenue to avenue without misadventure, he applied a little extra power as they flew down that street around one corner of which stood Lincoln Chambers, in order to make an impressive finish. In turning he described an accurate but short circle, so that the automobile careened slightly, causing Mrs. Wilson to utter an involuntary murmur. Paul, amused at her nervousness, suffered his attention to be diverted for an instant; the next he realized that a young child, darting from the sidewalk, was in the direct path of the rapidly moving machine. He strained every nerve to prevent a collision, shutting off the power and endeavoring to deflect the vehicle's course so that it might strike the curbstone to their own peril

rather than the child's; but the catastrophe was complete almost before he realized that it was inevitable. There was a sickening bump, accompanied by the screams of women; the red devil had overwhelmed and crushed the little victim, and stood panting and shaking like a rudely curbed dragon.

Paul jumped from his seat and lifted the child from the gutter into which it had been hurled and where it lay ominously still with its head against the curbstone. He found himself face to face with two women, in one of whom he recognized his aunt's secretary. The other with an assertive agony which made plain her right to interfere, sought to take the child from him—a flaxen-haired girl of about four—exclaiming:

"Oh, what have you done? You've killed her. You've killed her."

Meanwhile Mrs. Wilson, utterly shocked, sought to keep her head as the only possible amelioration of the horror. She whispered in Paul's ear: "There's a drug store opposite. We'll take her there first and send for a doctor." At the same time she put her arm around the mother's shoulder, and said, "Let him carry her, Loretta, dear. It is best so."

Loretta Davis desisted, though she stared wildly in her patron's face.

"The blood—the blood," she cried, pointing to the tell-tale streaks on the child's head. "I'm sure she's dead."

Acting on his aunt's suggestion, Paul bounded across the way with the limp form clasped in his arms. While those immediately concerned en-

deavored with the aid of the apothecary to ascertain that the injuries were not grave, a curious crowd began to gather in the store. By the time that the trial of the ordinary restoratives had made clear that the child was already beyond the aid of medicine, though Mrs. Wilson and Constance wrung their hands and counted the seconds in hope that the physician telephoned for would arrive, a reporter, a policeman, and a doctor appeared on the scene. The physician, who happened to be passing, was Dr. Dale, the oculist with the closely cut beard and incisive manner who had attended Constance. A moment's inspection sufficed him for a verdict.

"There is nothing to be done," he said.

At the fell words a wave of anguish passed through the group. Paul allowed Mrs. Wilson to take the baby from him; and, overwhelmed beyond the point of control, he bowed his head in his hands, and burst into tears. His aunt reverently clasped the stiffening form to her bosom regardless of the oozing blood which mottled her cloak.

"We must get Loretta home as quickly as possible," she whispered to Constance, and she started to lead the way so as to save the situation from further publicity.

But now that the doctor's usefulness was at an end, the two other representatives of social authority advanced their claims for recognition. The police officer, having relegated the gaping spectators to a respectful distance, began to inquire into the circumstances of the accident, in which he was ably surpassed by the agent of the press, who,

note-book in hand, had already been collecting material from the bystanders and composing a sketch of the surroundings before interviewing the principals. Paul gave his name and address, and made no attempt to disguise his responsibility for the tragedy. Mrs. Wilson, finding her way barred by the two functionaries, grudgingly gave similar information in the hope that they would be allowed to escape. As she bore the victim in her arms, this would have been the result had not Loretta, who was following close behind under the supervision of Constance, and who up to this point had seemed dazed by the proceedings, suddenly realized what was taking place. She clutched Constance's arm.

"Will it be in the newspapers?" she inquired with feverish interest.

The reporter overheard her inquiry. "You are the mother of the little girl, madam?" he asked, addressing her, pencil in hand.

"Yes. She is my only child."

"Your name is?"

"Loretta Davis."

"And the child's?"

"Tottie. She would have been five in a few weeks."

The reporter perceived that he had found a responsive subject. "I lost a little girl of just that age two years ago," he volunteered sympathetically. "Is there a photograph of Tottie which you could let me have for the press? The public would like to see what she looked like."

Loretta's eyes sparkled. She thrust her hand in her pocket and drew forth a photographer's

envelope. "Isn't it lucky," she cried, "I got these proofs only yesterday, and they're the living image of my baby."

As she hastily removed the package from her pocket, together with her handkerchief, Loretta let a small bottle slip to the floor. Constance, who was spellbound with dismay at the turn of affairs, stooped mechanically to pick it up. She recognized the pellets lauded by Loretta. In doing so her head nearly bumped against that of Dr. Dale, who was intent on a similar purpose. He got possession of the bottle, and instinctively he glanced at the label before transferring it to Constance. She observed that he shrugged his shoulders. As she put out her hand to take it from him, she said in a low, resolute tone:

"Will you tell me what those are?" Then as the physician regarded her searchingly, she added, "I have a special reason for asking. I wish to befriend her."

"Cocaine tablets," answered Dr. Dale. "The woman has the appearance of a drug habitué."

XXV

IN parting with the Rev. Mr. Prentiss without personal rancor and yet with an open avowal of his conviction that Constance would marry him in the end, Gordon Perry both made an admission and issued a challenge. His admission on the surface was simply that he recognized the rector's sincerity. In his own consciousness it went further; he recognized the validity of the conflict between them to an extent which he had up to this time failed to perceive, or at least to acknowledge.

The effect of this was to intensify the ardor of his convictions, but at the same time to cause him as a lawyer to respect his opponent's position, though he believed it to be utterly false. The interview had been absorbing to him sociologically, for it had crystallized in his own mind as concrete realities certain drifts or tendencies of which he had been aware, but which he had hitherto never formulated in words. Now that the occasion was come for doing so, the indictment—for it was that —had risen spontaneously to his lips. It was clear to him, as he had informed Mr. Prentiss, that there was a direct strife in American social evolution between those who sought eternal truth through the free processes of the human spirit and those who accepted it distilled through an hierarchy.

Just as in his sociological perplexities Gordon,

yearning to be a sane spirit, had abstained from radicalism and had sought relief in concrete practical activities, he had watched the theological firmament and had felt his way. If he realized that the Christian organizations which saw in the human soul a dignity which rejected mediation were merely holding their own as formal bodies, he comforted himself with the knowledge that the thousands of men and women who rarely entered the churches—among them many of the most thoughtful and busiest workers in the land—were to a unit sympathizers with the creed of soul-freedom and soul-development. Not merely this; he knew that among orthodox worshippers the secret belief of the majority of the educated already rejected as superfluous or antiquated most of the old dogmas. But with his reverence for religion as an institution, Gordon had no ambition to outstrip his generation; simply to be in the van of it. There was no attraction for him in iconoclasm; he craved illumination, yet not at the expense of rationalism. Now suddenly the practical issue of the Church's interference with the State, of the Church's imposition on mankind of a cruel, inflexible ideal, labelled as superior purity, had become both an immediate and a personal concern. His soul felt seared as by an iron; all his instincts of sympathy with common humanity, the helpless victims of an arbitrary aim to preserve the family at the expense of the blameless individual, were aroused and intensified. Viewed as a general issue, Gordon felt no question as to the outcome. Was it not already decided? The Church had never ceased to deplore as usurpation society's constantly

louder claim the world over of the right to regulate marriage, but without avail. It was only abuse by the State which had produced a reaction and given sacerdotalism another chance. But the particular, the personal issue, was a very different matter. For him it meant everything, and his whole being revolted at the possibility of losing the great joy of life through such a misapprehension of spiritual duty on the part of her who, so far as he was concerned, was the one woman in existence. Yet during the next weeks following the interview with the clergyman he experienced a sense of flatness which was almost despondency, for he realized that he had exhausted his resources. Mr. Prentiss had refused to aid him; on the contrary, had virtually defied him by expressing a triumphant conviction that Constance's decision was final. Could it be that she, whose lucidity of mind he had been wont to admire, would refuse to understand that the barrier which seemed to separate them was but an illusion? Surely it was not for the good of the world that true love—its most vital force—should be starved because the marriage tie was played fast and loose with by others. And yet he appreciated apprehensively the subtlety of this plea for the world's good; how modern it was, and how attractive to woman when made the motive for the exercise of renunciation. Truly, the priest had argued shrewdly, yet Gordon refused to admit that Constance could be deceived for long. That seemed too incompatible with her previous outlook and their delightful comradeship which had held love in disguise.

He concluded forthwith that his best hope lay

in terminating that comradeship. To resume it would make them brother and sister, a relation tantalizing to him, and which might be better than nothing to her, and thus strengthen her resolve. Accordingly, with Spartan courage, he never visited her. But he chose by his letters and his gifts to let her know unequivocally that he was waiting for her to relent—would wait until the end of time. He wrote to her that her dear image was the constant inspiration of his thoughts, and that he sighed for the sound of her voice.

While thus he chafed within, and yet endeavored to pursue his work as earnestly as though he had been able to forget, he received and accepted an invitation from the Citizens' Club to become a candidate for the State Assembly. He saw in this both relief and an incentive; public service would tend to divert and refresh his thoughts, and opportunity would be afforded him to promote legislation. It would suit him to become a member of the free parliament of men where, whatever its abuses and shortcomings, the needs of ordinary humanity were threshed out, and where true, practical reforms were piece by piece won from the vested traditions of the past.

At the same time he declared to the members of the committee which waited on him that in accepting their nomination he was not to be understood as offering himself to the voters as a denunciatory radical or as advocating all the so-called grievances aired at the Citizens' Club. His words were, "I agree to support every measure which I believe would be an immediate benefit to the community from the standpoint of justice and public

usefulness. If you are content with that guarded generalization, I shall be proud to serve you; but if you insist on my playing the demagogue or wearing the livery of the enemies of constituted society, I must decline the nomination."

"That's all right," asserted Hall Collins, who was the spokesman. "What we want this trip are two or three new pieces of timber in the ship of state, repairs we'll call them if you like it so, and we've chosen you as carpenter for the job. Side with us when you can, and when you can't we'll know you're honest."

This voiced the sentiment of the Citizens' Club, and it was no disparagement to the sincerity of its action that those who directed the club's affairs cherished hopes that the nominee, through his standing, would gain support from other quarters than the radical element and thus be more likely to win. Their hopes were justified. Gordon had a comfortable majority in his district, though it was understood that he had affiliations with so-called socialists and labor reformers.

During the first year of his service as a legislator he made no effort to fix public attention on himself by forensic readiness. He was studying the methods of procedure and familiarizing himself with the personnel of the assembly. But though his name did not appear conspicuously in the press notices—which was a disappointment to a certain lady constantly on the watch for it—this did not mean that he failed to attract the attention of his associates. On the contrary, his thoroughness, patience, and fairness were soon recognized, and when he rose to speak—which he did more fre-

quently in the later weeks of the session in relation to bills of importance where the vote was likely to be close—the members paid attention as though they were glad to know his reasons. It was perceived that he inclined to the party of progress rather than to the conservatives, but that he did not hesitate to turn a cold shoulder towards or to rebuke mere blatherskite or visionary measures.

A modern legislature has to deal with questions which vitally affect the development of the body politic; the relations of powerful corporations to the public and it to them; the demands of toiling bread-winners for shorter hours of labor and hygienic safeguards, and the newly fermented strife between the right to hold and the obligation to share the fruits of the earth and the profits of superior ability and industry. These were problems which particularly interested Gordon, and, as one by one they arose for action, he sought to solve each on its merits without prejudice and with an eye to justice. It was understood that he would be a candidate for the next assembly, and in making their forecast the sophisticated referred to him as a coming leader, one of the men who would control the balance of power by force of his intelligence and independence. The Citizens' Club was content with the part which he had played. Several measures in which it was interested had become law through his advocacy; others, though defeated, had gained ground; two notable bills conferring valuable franchises for next to nothing upon plausible capitalists had been exposed and given their quietus in spite of a persistent lobby; and the candidate had promised during the next session to

press the bill for a progressive legacy tax, an amendment to the existing legacy tax law, which would increase the sum levied in progressive ratio with the size of every estate transferred by death. This was a reform which Hall Collins and his intimates had at heart, and they had won Gordon to their side as an enthusiastic supporter of its essential reasonableness. The bill had been killed in committee for the past two years; yet the present year the adverse report had been challenged in the house and had been sustained by a comparatively small majority after strenuous and excited appeals to what was termed the sober, conservative sense of the American people. Gordon's speech in behalf of the measure was listened to with a silence which suggested a desire for enlightenment. After the debate was over there had been prophecies that another year it would stand a good chance of passing.

It was toward the close of Gordon's first session in the assembly that the harrowing death of Loretta's child occurred, and, owing to the prominence of the parties concerned in the homicide, which was the first automobile accident in Benham, became town talk. The newspaper artists illustrated the tragedy with drawings of the red devil in the act of striking the victim, portraits of everybody concerned, from Tottie to the apothecary into whose shop she had been carried, and camera cuts of the obsequies. There were appropriate editorials on the iniquity of allowing furious engines to be propelled at a rapid rate through the streets; and sensational conflicting rumors were rife in the news columns as to the amount by which the re-

pentant multi-millionaire had sought to idemnify the mother for his carelessness. Conjecture fixed it at various sums from one thousand to fifty thousand dollars, and one imaginative scribe conjured up the information that Tottie was to be replaced as far as possible by the most beautiful baby which the Howard family could procure by search or advertisement.

In his genuine distress for the irreparable evil he had wrought Paul Howard had gone straightway to Loretta to pour out his contrition and to express a willingness to make such amends as were possible for the catastrophe. He saw her twice; the first time on the day following the accident, when she appeared excited but dazed; the second on the morning after the funeral. Then her condition of mind bordered closely on exaltation as the result of being the temporary focus of public attention. She was surrounded by newspapers, and she insisted on calling Paul's notice to all the reportorial features. With special pride she made him note a cut which showed that the coffin had been piled high with the most exquisite flowers—a joint contribution from Mrs. Wilson and himself. Loretta's own apartment was also a bower of roses from the same sympathizing source, and the young woman was in her best dress—festal mourning—as though she were expecting visitors. Paul found some difficulty in broaching the question of indemnity. He was in the mood to draw his check for any sum in reason which the bereaved mother should declare to be satisfactory compensation for her loss, even though it were excessive, so that he might adjust the matter then and there. He had

every intention of being generous; moreover he knew that all this publicity concerning the accident was injuring his canvass for the Congressional nomination, and he hoped to create a reaction in his favor by behaving handsomely. But Loretta, though she obviously understood what he was driving at, evaded the topic, and when, in order to clinch matters, he told her in plain terms that he wished to make her a present and asked her to name the sum, she looked knowing and suspicious, as much as to say that she knew her rights and had no intention of committing herself.

Paul, who mistook her contrariness for diffidence, was on the point of naming an amount which would have made her open her eyes when she suddenly said with a leer intended to convey the impression of shrewdness:

"I'm going to talk with my lawyer first. People say it was all your fault, and that I ought to get a fortune. I've witnesses for my side."

Paul was taken aback. "It *was* all my fault. I've told you already that I was entirely to blame. And I'm anxious for you to tell me how much I ought to pay as damages. So there won't be any need of a lawyer on either side."

Loretta argued to herself that she was not to be caught by any such smooth words. She tossed her head.

"I don't know about that. I'm going to get one of the smartest attorneys in Benham to attend to my case." She waited a moment, then added triumphantly, believing that her announcement would carry dismay to her crafty visitor, "It's Gordon Perry, Esq., Counsellor-at-Law."

"Gordon Perry?"

Loretta construed his inflection of astonishment as consternation.

"Yes," she said, "I'm going to consult him this afternoon."

It was on Paul's lips to inform her that Gordon was his lawyer too, but her uncompromising attitude had produced its natural effect, and he felt at liberty to practise a little craft in his turn. If he were to disclose the truth, she would be likely to consult someone else; whereas Gordon and he could come to terms speedily. So he merely responded that he knew Mr. Perry to be an excellent attorney, and that he would be content to abide by his decision.

The final settlement required some diplomacy on Gordon's part on account of the difference in point of view between the contracting parties. Loretta had definitely fixed on ten thousand dollars as the Mecca of her hopes, than which, as she declared to Gordon at their first interview, she would not accept a cent less; whereas Paul was disposed to make her comfortable for life by a donation of twenty-five thousand. He naturally had discussed the subject with his aunt, and this was the sum which had been agreed on between them as fitting. Mrs. Wilson was overwhelmed by the disaster; it haunted her thoughts; and, though she remembered Loretta's original indifference regarding the child, it seemed to her that the only possible expiation would be a princely benefaction, such as would thrill the bereaved recipient. But when she in her turn mentioned the matter to Constance, the latter, who had been

mulling over the insinuation uttered by Dr. Dale, informed her what he had said. The effect of this intelligence was to strengthen the purpose which Mrs. Wilson and Paul had already formed to have the gift tied up so that Loretta could use only the income, and thus be protected indefinitely against designing companions and herself. But when Gordon, who had abstained from revealing the extent of Paul's intended liberality, suggested this arrangement, he encountered sour opposition from his client. It was manifest that Loretta had set her heart on being complete mistress of the ten thousand dollars, and that any curtailment of her power to exhibit it and spend it as she saw fit would be a bitter disappointment. Either she did not understand, or declined to understand what was meant by a trust, and plainly she regarded the proposition as a subterfuge on the part of the donor to keep his clutch on the money. Gordon endeavored to reason with her and to show her the disinterested wisdom of the plan, but she shook her head no less resolutely after he had finished. When her repugnance was stated to Paul, he bade Gordon pay her the ten thousand dollars in cash and say nothing about the remainder. He added good-naturedly:

"I suppose it's natural enough that she should like to finger the money. Let her blow it in as she chooses, and when it's gone I'll settle an annuity on her."

Loretta came to Constance on the following day with glittering eyes and exhibited her treasure-trove—a bank book and a roll of bills.

"It's all there," she said. "My lawyer went

with me and he saw me hand it all over except this hundred dollars to the man in the cage. My lawyer made me count it first. He's smart—Gordon Perry, Esq., Counsellor-at-Law. I'm rich now."

"But you will go on nursing just the same, won't you, Loretta? It's your profession, you know."

Loretta looked non-committal. "Perhaps. But I'm going to take a rest first and—and buy a few things." She spread out proudly the new crisp bank bills like a pack of cards. "I've never been able to buy anything before."

Solicitous as she felt regarding the future, Constance had not the heart to repress sympathy with this radiant mood. Blood money as it was, it would, nevertheless, mean many pleasures and comforts to the pensioner. It was no time for advice or for extracting promises of good behavior. So in a few words she showed the approach to envy which was expected of her.

By way of recompense, or because she had been waiting for congratulations to be paid first, Loretta presently paused, looked knowing, and giving Constance a nudge whispered oracularly, as one whose views were now entitled to respectful consideration, "I sounded him about you, Constance, and it's all right. I could see it is, though I guess he didn't like much my speaking. And what do you suppose I told him? That he mustn't get discouraged, for one had only to look at you to know that you were perfectly miserable without him."

"How dare you tell him such a thing? What right had you to meddle?" cried Constance, beside herself with anger and humiliation. She clenched her hands; she wished that she might

throw herself upon this arch, complacent busybody and box her ears. "This is too much! Besides, it is not true—it is not true."

"True? Of course it's true. And why should you mind its being true if you love him? I was trying to help you, Constance, so there's no use in getting mad."

Obviously Loretta on her side was surprised at the reception accorded her good offices, and at a loss to explain such an abnormal outburst on the part of her habitually gentle comrade. Perception of this swiftly checked the current of Constance's wrath, but, as her equanimity returned, the eyes of her mind became pitilessly fixed on herself. Perfectly miserable! Was not that indeed the real truth? And true not only of her but of him? Of him, who had told her that she was sacrificing the joy of both their lives to a fetich. Loretta's rude probing had made one thing clear —that it was futile to try longer to persuade herself that she was happy.

Yet her reply was, "I take you at your word, Loretta, that you meant no harm. Please remember, however, hereafter that my relations with Mr. Perry are a subject not to be spoken of to either of us, if you do not wish to be unkind."

Loretta stared, and laughed as though she suspected that this appeal was designed to put her off the scent. But she was too much absorbed in her own altered status to care to bandy words on the matter. Two days later she disappeared from Lincoln Chambers. But the fact of her absence awakened no concern in the mind of Constance for several weeks inasmuch as she had gathered

from Mrs. Harrity that Loretta had gone to another patient. But presently it transpired that she had taken all her belongings with her, and had made the charwoman promise to make no mention of that mysterious fact for the time being. Mrs. Harrity could throw no further light on the lodger's exodus, but admitted that under the spell of one of the crisp new bills she had asked no questions and subsequently held her tongue.

Constance immediately imparted her fears to Mrs. Wilson, who instituted promptly a search through the police authorities. Investigation disclosed that a woman answering to the description of Loretta had been seen at some of the restaurants and entertainment resorts of flashy character in the company of a man with whom there was reason to believe she had left town. It was found also on inquiry at the bank where here funds had been placed that the entire deposit had been withdrawn some three weeks subsequent to the date when the account was opened.

Confronted with this disagreeable intelligence Mrs. Wilson felt aghast. It occasioned her grievous personal distress that her ward should have fallen so signally from grace at the very moment when the spirit of righteousness should have triumphed, and she was displeased to think that her philanthropic acumen had been at fault. But the elasticity of her spirit presently prevailed, and it was with an exculpating sense of recovery and of illumination which was almost breathless that she said to Constance:

"I fear that we must face the fact that she is a degenerate; one of those unhappy beings whom the

helping hands of society are powerless to uplift because of their inherent preference for evil."

Upon her lips the word "degenerate" had the sound of the ring of fate and of modern scientific sophistication withal.

XXVI

A YEAR later, in the early days of spring and the closing weeks of the next State Assembly, Carlton Howard and his son Paul sat conversing in Mrs. Wilson's study. They had been dining with her, and on rising from the table she had invited them to keep her company in her private apartment while she busied herself with matters incident to the entertainment she was to give in a little more than a week to the members of the American Society for the Discussion of Social Problems, as the crowning festivity to its four days' meeting in Benham.

Mrs. Wilson was elated over the opportunity to mingle the thoughtful people of the country—some of whom, as seen at annual meetings of the society elsewhere, appeared to her to have cultivated intellectual aptness at the expense of the graces of life—and Benham's fashionable coterie. She reasoned that the experience would be stimulating for both, and with her secretary at her elbow she was absorbed in planning various features to give distinction to the event. Her hospitality, from one point of view, would not be the first of its kind in the annals of the society, for at each of the last two meetings—the one in Chicago, the other in St. Louis—there had been an attempt to entertain the members more lavishly than hitherto. So in a sense she felt herself on her

mettle to set before her visitors the best which Benham afforded, and so effectively as to eclipse the past and at the same time bring a little nearer that appropriate blending between beauty and wisdom to which she looked forward as an ultimate social aim.

She had been of many minds as to what form her entertainment should take, and had finally settled on this programme: Dinner was to be served at her house to the seventy-five visiting and resident members and a sprinkling of Benham's most socially gifted spirits, at little tables holding six or eight. A reception was to follow, to which the rest of her acquaintance was invited to meet the investigators of social problems. At this there was to be a vaudeville performance by artists from New York, after which, before supper, six of Benham's prettiest and most fashionable girls were to pass around, as keepsakes for the visitors, silver ornaments reminiscent of Benham in their shape or design. Mrs. Wilson was not wholly satisfied with this programme; she was conscious that it lacked complete novelty and was not æsthetically so convincing as some of her previous efforts; but considering the numbers to be fed—and she was determined that these thoughtful pilgrims should taste delicious food faultlessly served for once in their lives—she could think of no more subtle form of hospitality which would give them the opportunity to realize the artistic significance of her establishment.

There were so many things to be attended to, a portion of which occurred to her on the spur of the moment, that Mrs. Wilson had requested her

secretary to make long working hours, and occasionally, as on this day, to protract them through the evening. Constance was at her desk in the room appropriated to her use, which led out of Mrs. Wilson's study. The door was open, and where she sat it was easy to distinguish the conversation which went on there. When Mrs. Wilson needed her she touched a silver bell far more melodious in its tone that the squeak of electric communication. Constance had already exchanged greetings with her employer's brother and nephew, whose random dialogue, broken by the digestive pauses which are apt to occur after a good dinner, provided a cosey stimulus to Mrs. Wilson's musings. Mrs. Wilson enjoyed the feeling that she was in the bosom of her family, and that, at the same time, absorbed in her cogitations, she need give no more than a careless ear to the talk of railroad earnings and other purely masculine concerns. She was pleased too by the knowledge that Lucille was coming in a few days to pay her a visit, bringing her granddaughter and the new Nicholson baby, a boy. Her new son-in-law also was coming, and she could not help feeling elated at the prospect of letting Benham see that the marriage which ought to have been a failure had turned out surprisingly well, and that her daughter was a reputable and somewhat elegant figure in society—not exactly the woman she had meant her to be, but immeasurably superior to what she had at one time feared. She was aware in her heart that logically, according to her standards, Lucille was not a person to be made much of socially, and yet she intended her and her husband

to be a feature of her entertainment, and she felt sure that her acquaintance would regard them as such. Though the inconsistency troubled her, inducing, if she stopped to think, spiritual qualms, maternal instinct jealously stifled reflection, and, furthermore, pursuing its natural bent, was rejoicing in the opportunity. Once, when interrogated sharply by conscience, in the watches of the night, she had satisfied her intelligence by answering back that her behavior was ostrich-like but human. Since the rest of her world failed to turn a cold shoulder on Lucille, was it for her to withhold the welcome befitting an only child?

Paul Howard was now a Congressman-elect. His canvass for the nomination the previous autumn had been successful, and the rumors in circulation as to the sum which he had paid over to his manager to accomplish this result by methods more or less savoring of bribery, were still rife. These had reached Paul's ears, and he was unable to deny that the most sensational figures were far in excess of the actual truth. Concerning the rest of the indictment, he could say literally that he knew nothing definite. He had drawn checks and asked no questions. But in his secret soul he had no doubts as to its substantial accuracy, and after the first flush of victory was over the edge of his self-satisfaction had been dulled by regret at the moral price which he had been obliged to pay in order to become a Congressman. Yet he had comforted himself with the thought that otherwise he could not have won the nomination, and that he intended to become an exemplary and useful member. So by this time he had ceased to dwell

on the irretrievable and was enjoying the consciousness that he was to go to Washington, where he hoped to make his mark. Who could tell? With his means and popularity he might eventually become a United States Senator, or secure some desirable diplomatic appointment.

Paul had been spending a few days in New York, and personal business matters formed at first the topic of conversation between the two men. When presently the younger inquired if anything of general interest had happened in Benham during his absence, his father frowned and said:

"That man Perry is pressing his socialistic legacy tax bill."

Paul looked interested. He understood the allusion, for shortly previous to his departure for New York, in consequence of his father's animadversions, he had taken occasion to see Gordon and to discuss the question with him.

"I object to the principle; it's an entering wedge," continued Mr. Howard. "When you say that because I leave a larger estate than you, my estate shall pay a larger proportionate tax than yours, you confiscate property. It is only another step to make the ratio of increase such that after a certain sum all will be appropriated by the state. It would be a blow at individual enterprise, and so at the stability of the family. If you deprive men of the right to accumulate and to leave to their children the full fruits of their industry and brains, you take away the great incentive to surmount obstacles and to excel."

The banker in broaching the subject had

uttered Gordon's name with denunciatory clearness, so that Constance heard it distinctly. Her spirit rose in protest at the condemning tone, and she paused in her occupation to listen. As Mr. Howard proceeded she recognized the character of his grievance. In the last letter Gordon had written her, now more than a month previous, he had mentioned the fact that he was interested in the success of what he termed the progressive legacy tax bill, and she had closely followed its course in the legislature. She knew that the committee to which it was referred had reported in its favor by a majority of one; she had also gathered, from what she read in the newspapers, that it was regarded as the most important public measure of the session, and was to be hotly debated. While she sought to smother her personal feelings, so that she might give due consideration to Mr. Howard's argument, he paused, and Paul's voice retorted:

"I mentioned the one hundred per cent. argument to Gordon Perry, and he smiled at it. He said that so unreasonable and oppressive an extreme was out of the question, and a mere bogy."

"Will he guarantee it?" demanded the banker sternly. "He cannot; he can answer only for the legislative body of which he is a member. If the present bill passes, why may not an Assembly twenty-five years hence declare that the public good —meaning the necessary tax levy for the expenses of an extravagant socialistic republic—demands that all which any man dies possessed of in excess of half a million dollars should, by the operation

of a sliding scale of percentage, be confiscated by the State?"

"But on the other hand is it really unjust to tax the estate of one, who dies possessed of a fortune larger than is sufficient to satisfy every craving of his heirs, considerably more in proportion than that of the citizen of moderate means whose children need every dollar? That is what Don Perry would answer. Moreover, this bill is tolerably easy on the children of the rich, is rather more severe on brothers and sisters than on lineal descendants, and so on through the family tree. The people who inherit millions from a cousin are scarcely to be pitied if the State steps in and takes a respectable slice."

"To hear you talk one would imagine you were a supporter of the measure," said his father haughtily, recognizing Paul's proclivity to take the opposite side of an argument, but evidently regarding the subject as too serious for economic philandering.

Paul laughed. "I suppose I should vote against it on general principles—meaning that it's best to hold on to what one has as long as possible. But it's one of the sanest attempts to get at the surplus accumulations of the prosperous for the benefit of everybody else which has thus far been devised. Indeed, we're not pioneers in this—in fact, rather behind the times as a democratic nation. It has been introduced already with success, for instance, in the republic of Switzerland, and in Australia and New Zealand."

Mr. Howard made a gesture of impatience. "Very likely. The two last-named countries are

the hot-bed of socialistic experiments. Will you tell me," he added, with slow emphasis, "what society is to gain by disintegrating large fortunes acquired by energy and thrift? I myself have given away three million dollars for hospitals, libraries, and educational endowments in the last ten years. Will the State make a better use of the surplus, as you call it?"

"The trouble is, father, that some multi-millionaires are less generous than you. Evidently the State is of the opinion that the returns would foot up larger under a compulsory law than under the present voluntary system."

"Up to this time personal individuality has been the distinguishing trait of the American people. I believe that the nation has too much sense to sacrifice the rights of the individual to——"

He paused, seeking the fit phrase to express his meaning, and was glibly anticipated by Paul.

"To the envious demands of the mob. That is one way of putting it. Gordon Perry's statement would be that society has reached the point where the so-called vested rights of the individual must now and again be sacrificed on the altar of the common good, and that a moderate bill like this is the modern scientific method of rehabilitating the meaning of the word justice."

Unable to see the disputants, but listening with all her ears, Constance recognized the argument. The common good! Here was the same issue between the individual on one side and the community on the other; and this time Gordon was the champion of the State against the individual. Clearly he acknowledged the obligation — the

soundness of the principle provided that the sacrifice would redound to the benefit of civilization. Yet the same mind which demanded a progressive legacy tax bill in the name of human justice rejected an inflexible mandate against remarriage as a cruel infringement on the rights of two souls as against the world. There could be only one explanation of the inconsistency; namely, that he believed profoundly that such a mandate was not for the common good. She knew this already, yet somehow its presentation in this parallel form struck her imagination. While thus she mused Constance heard Mr. Howard say in response to Paul's last sally:

"I request that you will not entrust to that young man any more of the firm's business. I prefer an attorney with less speculative ambitions."

Paul laughed again. "As you will, father. Gordon Perry has all the practice he can attend to without ours. He is hopelessly on his feet so far as our disapproval—or even a boycott—is concerned."

"And his bill will not pass," said the banker, with the concise assurance of one who knows whereof he is speaking, and is conscious of reserve power. "I have sent for the chairman of our State Committee."

"If the party is against it, you know I am a good party man, father."

"It isn't a question of party. It goes deeper than that; it's fundamental. I've arranged for a conference——"

At this point Mr. Howard saw fit to lower his

voice. It was evident to Constance that he was imparting secrets, and revealing the machinations by which he expected to defeat or side-track the obnoxious measure. If only she could hear and warn Gordon! But what they said was no longer audible. The men's talk had dropped to an inarticulate murmur, which continued for a few moments, and then was interrupted by Mrs. Wilson's dulcet tones. The change of key had attracted her attention, which already in subconsciousness had followed the thread of the dialogue, though her deliberate thoughts were far away.

"I have been listening to you two people," she said aloud, "and it is an interesting theme. I agree with you, my dear Paul, academically; as an eventual sociological development the surplus should be appropriated for the public good. But I wonder if we are quite ready for it yet. In other words, can the community—the State—the mass be trusted to administer the revenues thus acquired so as to produce more wholesome and beneficent results for the general weal than are now being fostered by the wealthy and enlightened humanitarian few under the existing laws? In the present stage of our civilization might not the standards of efficiency be lowered by such a policy, and the true development of art and beauty be arrested? There is my doubt."

Her brother's response had the ring of an epigram. "To the end of time, Miriam, human affairs must be managed by the capable few, or the many will suffer. If you deprive able men of the power of accumulation, the price of bread will soon be dearer."

"And what the many hope for sooner or later is free champagne," remarked Paul.

Neither of his elders replied to this quizzical utterance, and there was a brief silence. Then Mrs. Wilson stepped to the doorway of the anteroom and told Constance that she did not require her services further that evening. She had suddenly remembered the former intimacy between her secretary and the protagonist of the bill.

For the next week Constance diligently studied the newspapers for information in regard to the mooted measure. The entire community seemed suddenly aroused to the significance of the issue, and the daily press teemed with reading matter in relation thereto. The debate on the occasion of the second reading of the bill was the most protracted and earnest of the session. As Mr. Howard had intimated, it was not strictly a party measure; that is, it found advocates and opponents among the members of each of the two great political parties; only the so-called socialistic contingent gave it undivided support. But developments soon revealed that nearly all the conservative, eminently respectable members of the party to which Mr. Carleton Howard belonged were lining up in opposition to the bill on one plea or another. It was denounced by some as dangerous, by others as unconstitutional; numerous amendments were offered in order to kill it by exaggerating its radical features or to render it innocuous. Constance imagined that she could discern the master hand of the banker in the fluctuations of sentiment, in some of the editorials, and in the solemn resolutions of certain commercial bodies.

It was at the third reading of the bill that Gordon made his great speech—great from the point of view of the friends of the measure, because it set forth without undue excitement and superfluous oratory the essential soundness and justice of their cause. A packed house listened in absorbed silence to the forceful, concise presentation. On the morrow the rival merits of the controversy were still more eagerly bruited throughout the State. Constance could restrain herself no longer. Her lover was being stigmatized by the lips of many as an enemy of established society, yet she must not go to him and show her admiration and her faith. But she would write—just a line to let him know that she understood what he was attempting, and that she was on his side in the struggle for the common good against individualism and the pride of wealth. By way of answer there came next day merely a bunch of forget-me-nots addressed to her in his handwriting. She pressed the dainty yet humble flowers to her lips, then placed them in her breast. They seemed to express better than the pomp of roses his steadfast allegiance to her and to humanity.

The days of the debate were those just preceding the coming of the pilgrims belonging to the Society for the Discussion of Social Problems. Constance's most formal duties in connection therewith had already been performed, but Mrs. Wilson kept her constantly at hand lest new ideas should occur to her or emergencies arise. Besides there were numerous minor details relating to the august entertainment on the final evening which demanded supervision. Constance was very busy,

but in her heart the query was ever rising, Will he win? She had learned that the bill had been put over for three days, and that the vote on its passage was to be taken on the date of Mrs. Wilson's festivity, probably in the late afternoon, as there was certain to be further discussion before the roll was called.

The four days' exercises of the Society consisted of the reading of papers on current national problems, one series in the morning, another in the evening, with opportunities for general comment. The afternoons were devoted to recreation and the visiting of points of local interest, such as the oil yards, pork factories, and other commercial plants across the Nye to which Benham owed its growth and vitality; to Wetmore College, the institution of learning for the higher education of women; and to the new public library and Silas S. Parsons free hospital. Mrs. Wilson was an absorbed and prominent figure at all the meetings. She had no paper of her own to read, but on two occasions she made a few remarks on the topic before the Society when the moment for discussion arrived. On the third day, moreover, at the end of the paper on "The Development of Art in the United States," the president rose and made the announcement of a gift of five hundred thousand dollars from Mrs. Randolph Wilson and her brother for the erection of a Free Art Museum for Benham on the land already bonded by the city. Constance had the satisfaction of hearing the applause which greeted the declaration of this splendid endowment. Mrs. Wilson had made it possible for her to attend several of the meetings as

educational opportunities, but she had received no inkling of this interesting secret.

Late in the afternoon of the next day, that fixed for the entertainment and for the ballot on Gordon's bill, Constance was informed by the butler that there was a woman below who desired to see her. The man's manner prompted her to make some inquiry, and she learned that the visitor was Loretta Davis; that she had asked first for Mrs. Wilson, and on being told that she was out had asked for herself. The servant volunteered the further information that she appeared to be in a disorderly condition, and that, but for his mistress's special interest in her, he would not have admitted her to the house.

Constance went downstairs excited that the wanderer had returned, yet reflecting that she had chosen a most untimely date for her reappearance. She said to herself that she would take a cab, bundle Loretta off to Lincoln Chambers, and conceal the fact of her presence in Benham from Mrs. Wilson until the following day. As she entered the small reception-room, she was shocked by Loretta's appearance. She looked as though she had lived ten years in one. Her cheeks were sunken, her eyes unnaturally bright, and her face wore the aspect of degenerate dissipation. She was more conspicuously dressed than her circumstances warranted, and her clothes appeared crumpled. But her air was jaunty, and she met Constance's solicitous greeting with an appalling gaiety.

"Well, I'm back again. I hear you've been hunting for me. I suppose you'll want to know all about it, so I might as well tell you my money's

gone. Some of it I lent to my friend—him I went back to—and the rest is spent. We've been in Chicago and New York, and—and I've had the time of my life."

She evidently hoped to shock Constance by this bravado; but distressed as the latter was by the painful levity, she took for granted that Loretta was not herself, and that though her speech was fluent she was under the influence of some stimulant, presumably the drug which Dr. Dale had specified. While she was wondering how to deal with the situation and what could be the object of Loretta's visit, the latter supplied the solution to her second quandary.

"I've seen all about the big party she's giving to-night. That's why I've come." She paused a moment, then continued in a cunning whisper, as though she were afraid of unfriendly ears: "I want to get a chance to see it—the folk, I mean, and the smart dresses. Lord sake," she added, noticing doubtless the consternation in her hearer's face, "I do believe you thought I was asking to come as one of the four hundred myself. Thanks, but I've left my new ball dress at home. They can tuck me in somewhere behind a curtain; I'd be quiet; or I'd dress as a maid. Manage it for me, Constance, like a decent woman." Her voice cracked a little, and her eyes filled with tears, suggesting a tipsy person. Then suddenly her manner changed; she squared her shoulders and said malevolently, "I'm going to see it anyway. It's a small thing to ask of her who helped to kill my only child."

It was a small thing to ask certainly, absurd as

the request seemed. Constance reflected that, inopportune as the application was, the decision, as Loretta had intimated, did not rest with her.

"I will ask Mrs. Wilson, Loretta," she said, to gain time to think. "She will be home before long."

At that moment the lady named entered the room. The butler had told her who her visitor was, and she had not avoided the interview. She had just come from an afternoon tea given in honor of the visiting pilgrims, and was attired in her most elegant costume. Loretta's eyes, as they took in the exquisite details of her appearance, dilated with the interest of fascination, yet their gleam was envious rather than friendly. Beholding the two women face to face, Constance, struck by the contrast, realized that they represented the two poles of the social system; that the one embodied aspiration, the graces of Christian civilization and glittering success, the other self-indulgence, moral decay, and hideous failure. Such were the prizes of deference to, and the penalties of revolt against, the mandates of society! Yet even as she thus reasoned her heart was wrung with intense pity, and it was she who offered herself as a spokesman and laid Loretta's petition before Mrs. Wilson. That lady's face was a study during the brief recital. Bewilderment, horrified repugnance, toleration, and finally hesitating acquiescence succeeded one another as she listened to the strange request and to her secretary's willingness to take charge of her discreditable ward if the permission to remain were granted. Obnoxious as the idea of having such a person in the house

at this time of all others appeared to her at first blush, Mrs. Wilson's philanthropic instincts speedily responded to the demand upon them in spite of its obvious and vulgar sensationalism. She, like Constance, found herself asking why she need refuse such a small favor to this unfortunate creature merely because the supplication was so distasteful to her. If Constance were ready to see that she did not make a spectacle of herself, and would keep an eye on her, why, after all, should she not remain? Might not the sight of the brilliant, refined spectacle even serve to reinspire her with respect for the decencies of life? Mrs. Wilson's imagination snatched at the hope. Consent could not possibly do harm to anyone, and it might be a means of reclaiming this erring creature.

Constance perceived how her employer's mind was working, and she made the course of acquiescence smooth by saying:

"We will sit together, Mrs. Wilson, where we can see and no one can see us. And in return for your consideration," she added meaningly, "Loretta agrees to conduct herself as a lady—in such a manner as not to offend anyone by her behavior so long as she is in this house."

"Very well," said Mrs. Wilson. "I am very glad to give my permission. You know what Constance means, Loretta?"

Loretta nodded feverishly. "I shall be all right," she said. She understood that they referred to her habits, and she was willing enough to guarantee good behavior, for she knew that she had the assurance of it in her own pocket—a

small hypodermic syringe, the use of which would steady her nerves for the time being. It was with an exultant intention of enjoying herself to the uttermost, and of fooling her hostess to the top of her bent, that after Constance had shown her to a room that she might put herself to rights, Loretta jabbed herself with the needle again and again in pursuit of forbidden transport.

An hour later when Loretta was asleep under the eye of a maid, Constance found time to consider how she could ascertain the result of the ballot, the haunting suspense as to which had kept her heart in her mouth all day. She lay in wait for the evening newspaper, but she ransacked its columns in vain, as she had feared would be the case. Evidently the vote had been taken too late for publication. While she stood in the hall trying to muster courage to call up one of the newspaper offices on the telephone and ask the question—which would assuredly be a piece of impertinence on the part of an unimportant person like herself—she heard the ring of the front door bell. When the butler answered it the commanding figure of Mr. Carleton Howard appeared in the vestibule and from the shadow of the staircase she heard him say with jubilant distinctness, "You will tell Mrs. Wilson, James, that the progressive legacy tax bill was killed this afternoon by a majority of three votes. Reconsideration was asked for and refused; consequently the measure is dead for this session."

Constance experienced that sinking feeling which a great and sudden disappointment is apt to bring. She had taken for granted that Gor-

don would win; that he would get the better of his opponents in the end, despite their endeavors, and gain a glorious victory for humanity and himself. Instead he had been crushed by his enemies, and was tasting the bitterness of defeat. He would bear it bravely, she did not question that, but how depressing to see the cause in behalf of which all his energies had been enlisted defeated by the narrowest margin on the very verge of success.

She remained for some moments as though rooted to the spot. As poor Loretta had once said, it is love which makes the world go round, and the world had suddenly stopped for her. She ascended the stairs like one in a trance and closed the door of her room. What would her sympathy profit him? How would it help him to know that her heart bled for him? Such condolence would be only tantalization. What he desired was herself—to possess and cherish in the soul and in the flesh—as the partner of his joys and sorrows, his helpmate and his companion. From where she sat she could behold herself in her mirror the comely embodiment of a woman in her prime, alive with energy and health. He sighed to hold her in his arms, and she would fain kiss away the disappointment of his defeat. Anything short of this would be mockery for him—yes, for her. They were natural mates, for they loved each other with the enthusiasm of mature sympathy. Yet they must go their ways apart, because the Church forbade in the name of Christ for the so-called common good. How could it be for the common good to resist nature, when she knew in her heart that in obeying the law of her being she

would feel no sense of shame or blame? On the one side was the fiat of the Church, and on the other the sanction of the people—of human society struggling for light and liberty against superstition and authority. That was Gordon's claim; yet he was no demagogue, no irreverent materialist. What would her own father have said—the country doctor whose sympathy with humanity was so profound? She felt sure that he would have swept aside the Church's argument in such a case as this as untenable. What was it held her back? The taunt that in obeying the law of her being she would be letting go her hold on the highest spiritual life, that most precious ambition of her soul, and forsaking the Christ whose followers had comforted her and lifted her up.

As thus she mused she heard Loretta stirring. She had arranged as a precaution that they should occupy chambers which opened into each other, and it behooved her now to pay attention to her —to see that she was suitably attired and to supervise her movements. When they were dressed she exhibited to her the large dining-room set with little tables, and afforded her a peep at the guests as they swept in. Later Loretta and she looked down from a small balcony filled with plants on the splendid company assembling in the music-room. Her charge was completely absorbed by the pageant, asking at first eager questions, which Constance answered with mechanical scrupulousness, for to her in spite of the brilliant scene the world seemed far away, and she still dwelt as in a trance. As soon as Loretta recognized Lucille, who in the most stunning of Parisian gowns was

assisting her mother to receive, she became nervously agitated, and after surveying her for a few moments she nudged her companion and said, "What did I tell you? Hasn't her marriage turned out all right, and isn't everybody at her feet? You might be down there with the rest of them to-night, if you'd only taken my advice."

The words brought Constance back to her immediate surroundings, but as she became aware that Loretta was thrusting in her face the fact of Lucille's triumphant presence, she realized that it had already been a significant item in her nebulous consciousness. But she laid her hand gently on the offender's arm and said, "Sh! No matter about that now. Remember your promise." Loretta grunted. She paid heed to the extent of changing her tone to a whisper, but murmured by way of having the last word, "It's unjust that you shouldn't be there; it's unjust." Then she became silent; but every little while during the evening she repeated under her breath the same phrase, as though it were a formula.

Constance remembered subsequently that as the evening advanced Loretta ceased to ask questions and grew strangely silent, seeming to follow with her eyes every movement of Mrs. Wilson, who in a costume of maroon-colored velvet set off by superb jewels and a tiara of large diamonds, swept with easy grace hither and thither in her endeavor as hostess to make the blending between the pilgrims and Benham's social leaders an agreeable experience for all.

It was in truth a notable entertainment; the guests appeared pleased and appreciative; there

were no hitches; the music evoked enthusiasm, the supper was delicious, and the closing distribution of trinkets by Benham's fairest daughters came as a delightful surprise to the departing seekers after truth. But all save the consciousness that she was facing a gay scene and was fulfilling her responsibilities was lost on Constance. She did not know until the next day that the entertainment had been a great success, for, oblivious to the music, the lights, and the brilliantly dressed assembly, her soul was wrestling once more with the problem which she had supposed solved forever. It was nearly one o'clock when the murmur of voices died away, and she conducted Loretta to their mutual apartment. She was glad that her charge showed no disposition to talk over the events of the evening, but on the contrary undressed in silence, busy with her own reflections. Having seen her safely in bed, Constance straightway sat down at her desk and wrote. It was a short, hasty note, for she was bent on posting it that night before the lights in the house were extinguished. Throwing a cloak about her, she glided downstairs, and, with a word of warning to the butler that he might not lock her out, sought the letter-box which was less than a hundred yards distant. She had not chosen to trust her epistle to any other hands. As she lifted the iron shutter she paused for a moment, then with a joyful little sigh she dropped it in and let go. Fifteen minutes later, like a happy, tired child, and wondering what the morrow would bring, she escaped from reality into the waiting arms of sleep.

But Mrs. Randolph Wilson was in no haste to go to bed. She was in a complacent mood. Everything had gone off as she intended, and it suited her to dwell in retrospect on the incidents of the festivity, and to muse fancy free. Lucille had kissed her good-night and had retired. She had let her maid loosen her dress and had dismissed her for the night. She was inclined to dally; she liked the silence and the sense of calm after the activities of the day.

Seated at her toilet table and looking into her mirror with her cheeks resting upon her hands, she gazed introspectively at herself and destiny. Her tiara of diamonds still crested her forehead. Somehow it pleased her to leave it undisturbed until she was ready to let down her hair. She was conscious that she had reached the age when she preferred to see herself at her best rather than in the garb of nature's disorder. It had been one of the eventful evenings of her life; she felt that by her efforts mind and matter had been drawn closer together without detriment to either. And everybody had been extremely civil to Lucille, at which she could not help rejoicing. Certainly, too, Lucille was acquiring more social charm and was more anxious to please people of cultivation. Then, too, her brother had appeared in his most engaging mood as a consequence of the defeat of the legacy tax bill. No reason for doubting her conclusion that the passage of the measure would have been premature under existing conditions had occurred to her; so it seemed that society had been saved from a mistake. Altogether the immediate present was marred by no unpleasant

memory but one. As to that, she felt that she had acted indulgently, and that on the morrow she would make a last effort to rescue the unhappy degenerate. As she surveyed herself in the glass she appreciated that she was well preserved and that her grizzled hair was becoming, but that the romance of life was over. She would never marry again; she was unequivocally middle-aged. Ideas were what she had left; but for this great interest she had many years of strength and activity ahead of her.

Ideas! How absorbing they were, and yet how little the most disinterested individual could accomplish! Truth looked so near, and yet ever seemed to recede as one approached it. Men and women came and went, generations lived and died, but progress, like the march of the glaciers, was to be measured by the centuries. The inequalities of life—how hideous were they still; how far from rectification, in spite of priests and charity! What was the key to the riddle? Where was the open sesame to the social truth which should be universal beauty? She was seeking it with all her soul, but she would never find it. Deep in the womb of time it lay, a magnet, yet inscrutable. Who would unearth it? Would it baffle mankind forever? or would centuries hence some searcher —perhaps a woman like herself—discern and reveal it?

Pensive with her speculation, she turned her eyes, wistful with their yearning to pierce the mysteries of time, full upon the mirror, and started. An apparition, a woman's face, cunning, resentful, demon-like, was there beside her own; a

woman's figure crouching, stealthy, about to spring was stealing toward her. Was it a vision, an uncanny creature of the brain? Instinctively she turned, and as she did so a large pair of hands gleamed in her face and reached for her neck. Springing up with a cry of horror, she recoiled from the threatening fingers, but in another instant she was bent backward so that her head pressed against the glass and she felt a powerful clutch upon her throat which took away the power to scream, and made her eyes feel as though they were bursting from their sockets. A voice, exultant, cruel, yet like a revivalist's chant, rang in her ears.

"I've come for you. We'll go together, down to eternity. There you will scrub dirty marble floors for ever and ever."

In the face in the mirror Mrs. Wilson had recognized Loretta, and she divined, as the wild figure threw itself upon her and the strong hands gripped her windpipe, that she was contending with a mad-woman. The import of the strange, accusing words was unmistakable; it was a struggle for life. Powerless to give the alarm save by inarticulate gasps, she realized that only her own strength could avail her, and that this must fail owing to the superior hold which her assailant had established. She strove with all her might to wrench herself free, but in vain. The long hands squeezed like a vise, and she was choking. She felt her senses swim, and that she was about to faint. Then with a rush a third figure intervened; someone else's hands were battling on her side, and in an instant she was free.

"I have surrendered."

Awaking suddenly, as one who is sleeping on guard often will, Constance had felt an instinct that something was wrong. The turning on of the electric light revealed that Loretta's bed was empty. Where had she gone? It seemed improbable that she had sought to escape from the house at that hour. Puzzled, she stepped into the hall and half-way down the staircase. There as she paused the light shining from under Mrs. Wilson's apartment on the landing below caught her eye. The next moment she heard a muffled scream.

It had required all her strength and weight to tear Loretta from her victim. Having succeeded in separating them, Constance hastily put herself on the defensive, expecting a fresh attack; but Loretta, panting from her exertions, stood facing them for a moment, then burst into a strident, gleeful laugh.

"You've saved her," she cried. "I'm crazy—stark crazy, I guess. What was it I said? I was going to take her where she'd have to scrub dirty marble floors forever and ever. I'd like to save her soul, she tried so hard to save mine. But it was time thrown away from the start. I was born bad—a moral pervert, as the doctors call it. Christianity was wasted on me."

She shook her head, and looked from one to the other. They, horrified but spellbound, waited, uncertain what course to pursue. Mrs. Wilson, now that she had partially recovered her poise, felt the impulse to elucidate this horrifying mystery. But though she wished to speak, the proper language did not suggest itself. How

could one discuss causes with a mad woman? She raised her hands to put in place the tiara which had been crushed down on her brow.

"Look at her," cried Loretta, commandingly, addressing Constance and pointing. "Isn't she beautiful? She's civilization." She made a low obeisance. "I was in love with her once; I love her still. You saved her."

She frowned and passed her hand across her forehead as though to clear her brain. Then she laughed again; she had recovered her clew.

"You were the sort she could help, Constance Stuart; you were good. But how has she—her church—paid you back? Cheated you with a gold brick. Ha! Made you believe that it was your Christian duty to let Gordon Perry, Esq., Counsellor-at-Law, go. That's the way the aristocrats still try to fool the common people. But isn't she beautiful? My compliments to both of you."

She swept a low courtesy in exaggeration of those she had witnessed a few hours earlier. "It is pitiful—pitiful and perplexing," murmured Mrs. Wilson in agonized dismay.

For a moment Loretta stood irresolute, then of a sudden she began to shiver like one seized with an ague. She regarded them distractedly with staring eyes, and throwing up her hands, fell forward on her face in convulsive delirium. Constance rushed to her side; the two women raised her and laid her on the bed. Mrs. Wilson's maid was aroused, and a physician communicated with by telephone. He came within an hour and prescribed the necessary treatment. He said that the

patient's system was saturated with cocaine, but intimated that she would probably recover from this attack.

After the doctor had gone and Loretta had been removed to her own room, Mrs. Wilson and Constance watched by the side of the sufferer, whose low moaning was the sole disturber of the stillness of the breaking dawn. Each was lost in her own secret thoughts. The cruel finger-marks on Mrs. Wilson's neck burned painfully, but the words of her mad critic had seared her soul. For the moment social truth seemed sadly remote. She reflected mournfully but humbly that ever and anon proud man and his systems are held up to derision by the silent forces of nature. When the darkness had faded so that they could discern each other's faces, she arose, and sitting down beside Constance on the sofa drew her toward her and kissed her. Was it in acknowledgment that she had saved her life, or as a symbol of a broader faith?

"Kiss me too, Constance," she whispered.

The embrace was fondly returned, and at this loosening of the tension of their strained spirits they wept gently in each other's arms. Then Mrs. Wilson added, "Come, let us go where we can talk. We could do nothing at present which my maid cannot do."

She led the way to her boudoir. The idea of seeking sleep had never occurred to either of them. Although Mrs. Wilson had felt the need of speech, it was some minutes after they had established themselves before she broke the silence. When she did so she spoke suddenly and with

emotion, like one beset by a repugnant conviction yet loath to acknowledge it.

"Can I have deserved this, Constance?" The vivid protest in her companion's face made clear that Constance did not penetrate her subtler meaning, and she hastened to answer her own question.

"Not to be strangled by a violent lunatic," she said, raising a hand involuntarily to her neck. "But her words were a judgment—a lacerating judgment. How I should loathe it—to scrub dirty marble floors forever and ever. It is just that—the dirt, the disorder, the common reek, which I shrink from and shun in spite of myself. How did she ever find out? I love too much the lusciousness of life.

> 'It is the little rift within the lute
> That by and by will make the music mute,
> And ever widening slowly silence all.'

Do you not see, Constance?"

Leaning forward with clasped hands and speaking with melodious pathos while the morning light rested on her tired but interesting face, her confession had the effect of a monologue save for its final question. And Constance, listening understood. In truth, this cry of the soul at bay came as a quickener to her own surging emotions, and she realized that the walls of the temple of beauty had fallen like those of Jericho at the trumpets of Israel. Yet though she understood and saw starkly revealed the limit of the gospel of the splendor of things, with all the purging of

perplexities which that meant for her, the claims of gratitude and of unabated admiration no less than pity caused her to shrink from immediate acquiescence in her patron's self-censure. And as she hesitated for the proper antidote, Mrs. Wilson pursued her confession relentlessly—pursued it, however, as one who recites the weakness of a cause to which she is hopelessly committed.

"One is spurred to refine and refine and refine, —does not even religion—my religion—so teach us?—the spirit ostensibly, and, in order to reach the spirit, the body; and in this age of things and of great possessions one reaches greedily after the quintessence of comfort until—until one needs some shock like this to perceive that one might become—perhaps is, an intellectual sybarite. Nay, more; though we crave almost by instinct individual lustre and personal safety, reaching out for luxury that we may grow superfine, must not we —we American women with ideals—mistrust the social beauty of a universe which still produces the masses and all the horrors of life? Can it fundamentally avail that a few should be exquisite and have radiant thoughts, if the rest are condemned to a coarse, unlovely heritage?"

Not only did gratitude reassert itself as Constance listened to this speculative plaint, but protesting common sense as well, which recognized the morbidness of the thought without ignoring its cogency.

"Ah, you exaggerate; you are unjust to yourself," she exclaimed fervidly. "You must not overlook what your influence and example have been to me and many others. I owe you so much!

more than I can ever repay. It was you who opened the garden of life to me."

Mrs. Wilson started at the tense, spontaneous apostrophe, and the color mounted to her cheeks. Never had so grateful a tribute been laid at her feet as this in the hour of tribulation. And as she gazed she felt that she had a right to be proud of the noble-looking, the sophisticated woman who held out to her these refreshing laurels.

"And it is not that I do not comprehend—that I do not share your qualms," Constance continued, ignoring the gracious look that she might express herself completely in this crucial hour. The time had come to utter her own secret, which she felt to be the most eloquent of revolts against the mystic superfineness she had just heard deprecated. "Within the last twelve hours the scales have fallen from my eyes also, and what seemed to me truth is no longer truth. There is something I wish to tell you, Mrs. Wilson. Yesterday afternoon I heard that the legacy tax bill had been defeated; last night before I went to bed I posted a letter to Gordon Perry informing him that I would be his wife. I have asked him to come to see me at Lincoln Chambers this morning."

Mrs. Wilson's lip trembled. Genuine as was her probing of self, this flank attack from one who just now had brought balm to her wounds and cheer to her soul was a fresh and vivid shock. To feel that this other ward, whom she had deemed so safe, was about to slip from her fingers was more than she could bear. Then instinctively Constance went to her and put her arm around her. "I am sorry to hurt you," she said tenderly,

"but this is a time to speak plainly. I love him, and I feel that I have been trifling with love. I am sure at last of this: that it is better for the world that two people like him and me should be happy than live apart out of deference to a bond which is a mere husk. I prefer to be natural and free rather than exquisite and artificial. As Gordon said, the ban of the Church when the law gives one freedom is nothing but a fetich. I cannot follow the Church in this. To do so would be to starve my soul for the sake of a false ideal—a false beauty cultivated for the few alone, as you have intimated, at the expense of the great heart of humanity. I can no longer be a party to such an injustice; I must not sacrifice to it the man I love."

There was a brief silence. Mrs. Wilson, as her question presently showed, was trying to piece together cause and effect.

"You wrote to him last night, Constance? Then this—horror had nothing to do with your decision?"

"Nothing; I had been on the verge of it for some time: I can see that now. And when the news of his defeat came, I felt that I must go to him if he would let me."

"He will let you, Constance."

"I think so," she answered with a happy thrill.

Mrs. Wilson looked up at her, and observing the serenity of her countenance, knew that the issue was settled beyond peradventure. Yet she was in the mood to be generous as well as humble; moreover, her inquiring mind had not failed to notice the plea for humanity and to feel its

force. She sighed gently, then patted the hand that held hers, and said:

"Perhaps, dear, you are right. At all events, go now and get some sleep. You must look your own sweet self when he comes to you."

A few hours later Constance, refreshed by slumber, was on her way to Lincoln Chambers. She walked as though on wings, for she knew in her heart that her lover would not fail her. Arriving a little before the appointed time, she dismissed the children to school, and, smiling at fate, waited for what was to be. At the stroke of the trysting hour she heard his knock. She bade him enter, and as their eyes met he folded her in his arms.

"Gordon!"

"Constance!"

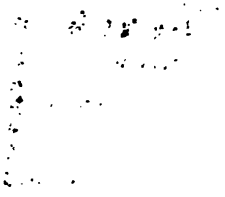
"I have surrendered." She looked up into his face, bewitching in her happiness.

"Thank God for that!"

"But I come to you conscience free, Gordon," she said, drawing back her radiant face so that he must hear her avowal before his title was complete. "I would not have you think that I have compromised or juggled with myself. If I believed that I should be a whit less pure and spiritual a woman by becoming your wife, I would never have sent for you, dearly as I love you."

"And I would not have had you, darling. The love which is conscious of a stain is a menace to the world."

THE END



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